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AMAZING STORIES

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By WILLIAM P. MCGIVERN



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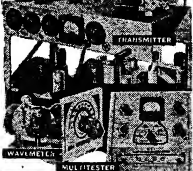
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Published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 145 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. New York Office: Empire State Building, New York 5, N. Y. Entered as second class matter June 3, 1947, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional second class entry, Holyoke, Massachusetts. Subscription: in U. S., Canada, Mexico, South and Central America and U. S. Possessions, \$2.50 for 12 issues, all other foreign countries \$3.00 for 12 issues. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 145 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.



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Cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating
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The

OBSERVATORY

..... by the Editor

THIS, it seems, is where we came in! Two years ago (August 1947), after five years of editing *Mammoth Detective* and *Mammoth Mystery*, we lit out for Hollywood to get our hands on some of that studio gold we'd been hearing about and to paw the ground whenever one of those luscious movie-star dames went undulating by. Too, there were promised such added attractions as sunshine 397 days a year, mountains, beaches, oranges and canary-yellow convertibles. Heaven wasn't straight up; it was straight West!

WELL, Hollywood and its environs didn't let us down. True, two inches of snow fell one day, but nobody really minded except the natives and they blamed it on the lowans in Long Beach. And while we never did get enough of that movie money to retire on, we once sat at a restaurant table next to Susan Hayward, and she's even more beautiful off the screen! The mountains were swell, the beaches big and clean, and the oranges in our backyard got to be the size of golf balls.

WE wrote a couple of books and a flock of radio plays and a number of science-fiction novels (*The Man From Yesterday*, *Forgotten Worlds*, *Return of Tharn*, etc.)—all of which added up to a comfortable living during those two years. And then one day Ray Palmer decided to be a publisher himself, and Mr. Davis asked us to come back and take over. We thought about it for fifteen seconds or so, then said okay...and that brings you up to date, in case you were interested.

JUST what, if anything, does this change in editors mean as far as this magazine is concerned? To begin with, *Amazing Stories* is exactly what its title proclaims it to be: stories that will amaze and entertain you, written by the best writers in the business. During most of its twenty-five years, *Amazing Stories* has served as a challenge and a spur to scientists by its example of "what man can imagine, man can do!" Television, radar, supersonic speeds, rocket warfare, nuclear fission—these and many other of today's achievements were first revealed in the pages of

this magazine. And in these pages will appear the first mention of other forthcoming miracles of science—often before they have reached the drafting boards, not to mention the minds, of our scientists themselves!

SECONDLY, we mean to bring to you a much wider selection of stories—tales of high adventure in interstellar space, stories of the terror that lurks in the unplumbed depths of the human mind, yarns of travel through Time. Even our features will show a change: since this is a magazine of the future, we shall bring you vignettes of life in the years ahead and previews of what advances will be made in many of our customs and machines.

MORE, you'll find new writers on our contents pages—as well as authors whose work you've acclaimed through the years. As you've already noticed, the lead novel this month bears the by-line of one of the best writers in *Amazing Stories'* history: William P. McGivern. Bill has become one of this country's leading detective story writers, with two novels that have won him no small amount of praise from reviewers.... Authors like Robert Moore Williams, Roy Phillips, and Craig Browning will continue to bring you the tops in science-fiction, of course.

THIS issue will give you a good-sized portion of what to expect in the future from the pages of your favorite science-fiction magazine. But next month! ...well, listen to this: First, 196 pages! This means that *Amazing Stories* goes back to its old position as the BIGGEST science-fiction magazine on the stands—not only in quality but in quantity! Second, a novel by a newcomer in the field. His name is Robert Abernathy and he gives you a breath-taking yarn of a war between worlds. Third, novelettes by such masters in the field as Willard Hawkins, William Temple and Ward Moore. Fourth, the return of DISCUSSIONS—a department too long absent from our pages. Why not sit down now and write us what you think of the changes we propose for *Amazing Stories*—as well as what you want to go into it?.....HB

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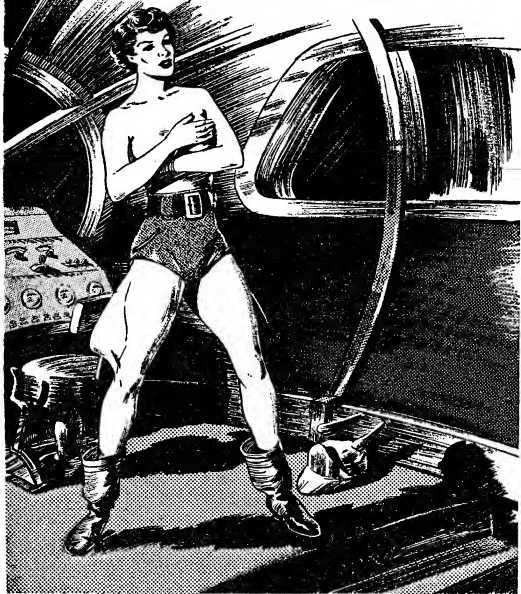
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The GALAXY RAIDERS

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN



THE WIDE arched corridor and the imposing doors at its end were familiar to him; and he knew the feeling that came when the four-man guard military guard snapped to attention at their approach.

His right hand moved instinctively to return the salute, and then stopped short.

The rigid respect of the guards was not for him, John Storm knew.

Hardly. It was the the vice admiral at his side, who returned the salute casually and put a friendly hand on Storm's arm as the doors swung open.

"Go right in, John. They're expecting you, of course," he said. "It was damn nice of you to come after— Well, bygones are bygones, I always say and a good thing too," he finished hastily.

"Oh, sure," John Storm said, and there only the barest sarcasm in his

Before the Earth could hope to be saved, the man who defended her must learn humility . . .

Color poured into the girl's cheeks. "If you can stop staring at me," she snapped, "I'd like to have back my uniform jacket!"



flat hard voice.

They walked together into a large bright room, unadorned except for floor-to-ceiling maps that covered the walls and the green and white standards of Earth Federation hanging above the conference table at the far end of the room.

Seated at the table were eight officers of the Federation, representing top authority in each world zone—men whose most casual word was considered important, and whose commands could send millions of men and thousands of fighting units into action.

They stood as Storm approached and the Controller, a slender graying man who wore the yellow epaulets of a First Marshal, came forward and extended his hand with a smile.

"It's good to see you again, John," he said. "It's been eight—no—nine years, hasn't it?"

"Eleven," John Storm said, and a smile flickered on his strong dark face.

"Of course. Well, you know everyone, I think."

Storm glanced at the men behind the table and nodded. He knew them all. Stoddard, Logistics; Malcom, Communications; Baley, Supply; Millholland, Electronics; Crestweather, Space Arm—that was good. Space Arm!

They all sat down then and the Controller glanced at a paper before him, and then at Storm with a slight smile.

"You know why we asked you to come here, I suppose?"

"Yes," Storm said. He crossed his legs and settled back comfortably in his chair. There was a controlled and deliberate sense of power in every move he made. Too thick and massive through the shoulders to be considered well built, and too dark and bit-

ter to be considered handsome, he was nevertheless a man to be looked at twice. His eyes were a quiet gray, and his hair was black as jet and straight.

"Yes," he said again. "I know why you want me. The threat from space is more acute than it was eleven years ago—when I was cashiered from the service for being a wide-eyed radical who wanted the Federation to build up its Space Arm."

The Controller spread his hands in a helpless gesture. "Mistakes were made then, John," he said. "We didn't see what was coming. Men like Commander Griffith and yourself—you were the casualties of our blindness."

The name of Commander Griffith brought a frown to Storm's face, and as the Controller talked soothingly and placatingly, a flood of bitter memories swept over him....

COMMANDER GRIFFITH had made the first long Space flight of history in the late Seventies. To Jupiter. Storm had been in his crew. It was not a military flight; there were no funds for that. Griffith, a dedicated, fearless and brilliant scientist paid for the trip from his own pocket. Accompanying him were his wife Grace and his daughter Karen. They had stayed on Jupiter for three months, and then had received a trans-space message from Earth ordering them to return. There had been a vicious public reaction to the trip from influential ignoramuses who said the mysteries of space were not for man to unravel, and now these fools had forced the Federation to order Griffith's ship the *Astra Star*, to return at once to Earth.

Griffith had refused and the Federation sent its entire fleet of four ships to Jupiter to enforce the order. They had arrested the crew, but

Griffith, his wife and daughter and a man named Thatcher had escaped into the wilds of mountainous volcanic ash that dotted the planet, and were deserted, left behind when the Federation crafts returned to Earth.

This was regarded as poetic justice by those who had fought the trip in the first place. But Storm had begun then to wage a campaign for the rescue of Commander Griffith and for an immediate development of the Federation's air arm. For even then Galaxy X was causing concern among the enlightened members of the command.

But John Storm was not tactful or diplomatic, or politic. He raged at his superiors, he conducted experiments of his own without official sanction and he talked—to newspapermen radio reporters, to every agent of communication he could get to listen. The result was that he became a thorn in the sides of the top brass of the Federation, a stern logician, who went directly to the people instead of clearing things with his superiors and so he was arrested, court-martialed, and thrown out of the service....

"... AND SO," the Controller said, "that's what we are hoping you'll do for us. Take a ship to Jupiter, not to look for Commander Griffith, since that I fear would be futile, but to establish an outer defense post there in case our worst fears of Galaxy X are realized."

"How many ships?" Storm asked.

The Controller looked embarrassed. "One," he said.

Storm stood up and dropped his cigarette on the floor, then ground it out with his heel. "You're still fools," he said bitterly. "You want me to establish an outpost to give you warning against any raiders from Galaxy

X—and be in the first line of defense against them. Yet you talk of one ship!"

"Appropriations," the Controller said, with a helpless shrug. "We're not politicians, Storm. We have to trim our sails to their commands."

Storm looked over their heads to the bright green-and-white standards of the Federation and his thoughts went slowly back across the years of his bitter fight for a Space Arm and he knew that now, as then, he'd have to take any chance that was offered. But one ship! He rubbed his forehead and grinned bitterly. "All right," he said. "What rank do I take?"

"Commander. We couldn't do any better."

"Okay," Storm said impatiently. "Send me my orders as fast as you can."

He turned and without another word strode from the silent chamber....

THE SHIP was a shining tube of deadly beauty, four hundred yards long and towering a hundred yards in the air. From the tapering nose with its multiple banks of viscreens, to the flaring fins and blast nacelles, the giant space craft was a tribute to the men whose dream had made it live.

Storm stood at the foot of the ramp leading to the amidships entrance and let his eyes travel over his ship. *His* ship! Far above him he saw the name gleaming blackly on the soaring curve of the prow—*Astro Star II*.

He drew a deep breath and walked up the incline to the ship, returned the salute of the cadet on duty and went forward to his combination office and sleeping quarters.

Inside, Storm closed the door and

sat down at his desk. He lit a cigar and began the laborious process of reading through the reports prepared for him on each man in his crew. He studied their firing records, their communication reports, their physical conditions and even glanced at their clothing allowance and inoculation charts.

Finishing, he pushed the neat stack of papers aside and slumped deeper into his chair. He smoked thoughtfully for several minutes, enjoying the heavy fragrance of tobacco and savoring the thought that the routine details of flight preparation were over and done with.

They were ready to go now. Six weeks had been spent in training. The men were as ready as they'd ever be. There were good men aboard, good officers, too. But it would take the gruelling job ahead to test them. How they'd stand up was anybody's guess.

He pushed a button at his elbow, then stood and poured himself a drink from the table at his reading chair. His apartment was sparsely furnished. There were a cot, desk, reading chair, and of course his books and charts.

A knock sounded and he said, "Come in."

It was his chief engineer, MacDonald, a tall graying man with thoughtful eyes and a reserved manner.

"Yes, sir," he said. He stood at attention easily.

"That's all right, MacDonald," Storm said. "Will you have a drink?"

MacDonald hesitated almost imperceptibly, then said, "I think not, sir, if it's all the same to you."

"Very well."

Storm put his drink down. He had no flair for relaxing with his men, for being genial and off-handed. It

didn't bother him particularly; he knew he was respected but not liked by most men. There was a wall of stubborn steel around him that rebuffed all but the most impersonal contact.

"We will blast-off sometime tomorrow morning, probably before eight, and not after nine. I want everything ready by six."

"Yes, sir. Will that be all?"

"That's all," Storm said curtly.

WHEN MACDONALD had gone Storm walked into the intercom panel and flicked open the switch. "Hear this," he said, in his hard flat voice, and in his imagination he could see men stopping their work in all parts of the craft, of men in bunks rising up one elbow, of sleeping men waking, as his voice, the supreme voice on the ship, was carried echoing throughout the corridors and compartments of the craft.

"Hear this," he repeated. "All leaves are cancelled as of now. No one will be allowed off the ship unless he has my written permission. All personnel except guards on duty will assemble in the forward gun chamber in fifteen minutes. That is all."

Storm flicked off the switch and went into his bedroom where he washed his face and hands and put on a clean shirt. He put on his tunic and fastened the command belt with its five-starred buckle about his flat waist.

Turning toward the door he saw himself in the mirror, and noticed the lines of exhaustion at the corners of his mouth, the hard look of his eyes. Readying the *Astro Star II* had meant twenty hours of work every day. It hadn't been fun; but there was nothing else he'd rather

have done.

Smiling, he left his office and walked down the companionway to the forward gun chamber where he had scheduled the meeting of the ship's company.

THE DOORS leading to the gun chamber were ajar and Storm stopped as he heard a great shout of laughter from inside the room.

Someone called for silence and as the laughter faded another voice said, "Really, men, I'm not that funny. The credit should go to our indomitable skipper who supplies me with all the material."

Storm took an involuntary step forward, his great hands clenching. But he stopped as the carefree mocking voice beyond the doors continued speaking.

Storm knew the voice. It belonged to Captain Larry Masterson, a gunnery officer, whose recklessness and irresponsibility had worried him since the first day of training. He had thought of getting rid of him; but Storm didn't like admitting he couldn't handle the situation.

Larry Masterson now was telling the men in the gun chamber the circumstances of his first meeting with Commander Storm. The muffled laughter was a tribute to his ability as a mimic.

Storm pushed the doors open gently and watched with hands on hips, as Larry Masterson continued his story.

Masterson was facing a semi-circle of seventy or eighty crew members, and speaking in a broadly comic imitation of Storm's hard flat voice. "The hand salute," the young captain was saying, "is not intended to convey anything but respect. It is not a gesture by which one indicates high spirits or personality, Captain."

"Quite right," Storm said mildly, and walked into the room.

Larry Masterson stiffened suddenly and the circle of crew members after one horrified look at Storm raised their eyes in agonized innocence to a point high in the air.

Storm said to the captain, "You're carrying your childishness too far, young man. You're getting infantile."

Larry Masterson stared over Storm's shoulder, stiffly at attention, but there was a hint of secret laughter at the corners of his mouth.

"Captain," Storm said, "do you think you're amusing?"

Larry hesitated an instant before saying, "Yes, sir," in a meek voice.

Someone laughed; and Storm knew he was allowing the situation to become difficult.

"Report to my quarters in ten minutes" he said to the young captain, and then turned to face the semi-circle of crew members. They fell into immediate silence.

"I asked you to come here for one reason," Storm said, speaking in a tight clipped voice. "Leaves are cancelled, as you know, and you deserve to know why. Tomorrow morning we blast off for Jupiter. I—"

Someone let out a yell and then the entire crew was cheering. Storm watched them for a moment, then held up his hand for silence. He was not touched or impressed by the demonstration. It meant nothing. The time to cheer was when something had been accomplished.

"You know the job ahead of us," he said. "It may be difficult, tiresome and dangerous. But understand this, gentlemen: we will do that job. I will accept excuses, but not failure. Carry on!"

STORM WAS lighting a cigar when a knock sounded on the

door of his quarters. He opened the door and saw Captain Larry Masterson standing there at attention.

"Captain Masterson reporting as ordered, sir," he said.

"Come in," Storm said.

He puffed on his cigar until it was drawing to his satisfaction, then looked at the young officer and said, "Don't you like this assignment, Captain?"

Captain Masterson made the slightest of shrugs. "Is my attitude important, sir?"

"Not to me, but I thought it might be to you."

Storm studied the younger man thoughtfully. Larry Masterson was tall, slimly built, with curly blonde hair and merry blue eyes. Except for a certain untried look about his mouth he was an extremely handsome young man. Storm knew that he came from a wealthy influential family, which had placed many of its members in top military and diplomatic posts. The boy's father was a retired secretary of Conservation, and several of his uncles had been in the World Parliament.

Storm said, "Are you worried about the uncertainties of inter-planetary travel, perhaps?"

The young captain flushed. "I asked for the assignment, sir. I've been a space flier since I graduated from the Cadet Center. I know what space is, sir."

"Oh, I'm sure you do," Storm said with heavy irony. "Then what is it that makes you undermine my authority aboard the ship?"

"Do I have to answer that question, sir?"

"I would prefer that you do," Storm said dryly.

"Very well, sir. I find it difficult to serve under an officer who has been dishonorably discharged from the service."

Storm stood motionless for an instant, and then he carefully knocked the ash from his cigar.

"That will be all, Captain."

"You asked for it," Larry said, hotly. "That's the way I feel and—"

Storm's voice cut harshly across his sentence. "I said, that will be all, Captain."

"Very well, sir."

When he had gone Storm stared at the closed door for several moments without moving. Then he pounded a fist into his palm and his eyes were hot and bitter.

CHAPTER II

THE BLAST-OFF was without incident. The mighty *Astro Star II* moved up through Earth's atmosphere under auxiliary power and then, at sixty thousand feet, the aft atomic rockets crackled into life.

The ship leaped upward trailing a mile-long stream of orange fire in its wake. It hissed through the thinning atmosphere and cleared the Heaviside layer in a matter of seconds. Void-bound, it wrenched itself clear from the pull of Earth, and shot outward with flashing silent speed.

Storm left the bridge then and returned to his quarters where he snapped on the visi-screen. He watched the depths ahead for a few moments, noting asteroid clusters, and comets that appeared on their course. Everything was routine so far. The powerful deflector rays of the *Astro Star II* spread thousands of miles beyond the ship and nothing smaller than a class I comet could penetrate that buffer.

Nothing of incident occurred until the second day. Storm was at his desk checking reports from his sub-commanders on the operation of the

ship, when his orderly knocked and entered with an anxious expression on his face.

"Sir, there's trouble in compartment B."

"What happened?" Storm said, rising from his chair.

"A cadet has gone berserk sir."

"A little early for hysterics," Storm muttered, and went down the corridor toward B at the half-trot. The door to the compartment was locked; and there was no response to Storm's resounding knock.

He stared at the door for a second, then pulled his heat gun. Compartment B, he knew, was the sleeping and recreation quarters for the cadet members of the crew, most of them youngsters in their last year of training.

Storm adjusted his gun for a two-foot target and played a ray of white heat against the lock of the door. It dissolved instantly and he nudged the door open cautiously with his foot.

Through the aperture he saw that eight crewmen were standing against one wall with their hands raised in the air. They were all officers, and among them he noticed Captain Larry Masterson.

On the floor were lying two cadets in shorts and beside them were long handled brushes and buckets of soapy water. The two men were looking fearfully past a third cadet who stood above them with a heat gun in his hand. The gun was trained unwaveringly on the officers.

This cadet was a slightly built youth who wore the green tunic, black trousers and white cap of a first class cadet. Storm couldn't see his face.

"I don't intend to be treated as a child by you barbarians," he was saying in a light cool voice to the officers as Storm eased through the

door and began to close in on him from behind.

"You may humiliate these other cadets if they allow it, but I'll put a hole through the first man who tries to give me a bath I don't need."

Storm moved with savage speed as he came up behind the cadet. His right hand chopped down in a blurring arc and the rock-hard edge of his palm cracked against the cadet's arm. The gun flew upward and Storm caught it in mid-air; the cadet cried out in pain and dropped to the ground, clutching his injured arm.

Storm glanced at the two cadets lying on the floor. "Get up," he said, and then he swung around to face the officers, who had lowered their arms and were facing him sheepishly.

"I think you men understand my orders about hazing," he said curtly. "Return to your rooms and consider yourselves under arrest. I will talk to you later."

Several officers had come in behind Storm with guns drawn. They put them away at a motion from him. He glanced down at the cadet who still lying on the floor clutching his arm, and said, "Report to me immediately in my quarters," and left the compartment...

"WHAT'S YOUR name?" Storm said to the cadet a little later in his office.

"Thomas, sir," the cadet said in a low voice.

Storm sat at his desk, a dark frown on his face. He studied the cadet carefully. The boy was slim, with fine features, fair skin and deep, vivid-blue eyes. His hair was black and cut short. He was older than Storm had first judged. There was a weary, tired bitterness in his face that contrasted oddly with the boyish fairness of his skin.

"What was the idea of that tan-

trum?" Storm asked quietly.

"I—I saw no reason to submit myself to the indignity of being scrubbed with a stiff brush."

"You realize you could be shot for drawing a gun on a superior officer?"

"Yes, sir."

"How's your arm?"

"All right, sir." The cadet touched it with his other hand and winced painfully.

"Take off your jacket," Storm said, and turned to his desk. He wanted to get to the bottom of this situation, for any tempermental explosion like this might set off a series of them, like a string of fire-crackers. He found his resentment against Captain Masterson growing. Trust that young fool to precipitate such a situation.

He turned around and his anger suddenly sharpened as he saw the cadet still wearing his jacket.

"It's all right, sir," the cadet said hastily.

"By God, I don't give orders to hear the sound of my voice" Storm snapped. "Take off that jacket!"

The cadet made no more to obey; and Storm's patience ran out. He stood and grabbed the young man by the arm and jerked him about. The cadet struggled in his grasp and kicked backward at Storm's shins.

"You need a taste of discipline," Storm said grimly.

He twisted the cadet's uninjured arm sharply and brought him to the floor in a kneeling position. Then he gripped the collar of his jacket and ripped the garment down over his elbows. Buttons spattered the floor.

"Now stand up and finish the job," Storm said.

The cadet got slowly to his feet, and the jacket slipped from his arms and dropped to the floor.

"Turn around," Storm ordered.

The cadet obeyed slowly, smiling bitterly, and Storm suddenly felt the breath leave his lungs in a rush.

"Good God," he said.

The "cadet" was a girl!

SHE FACED him unashamedly defiantly, nude from the waist up, her shoulders thrown back and her head held high. Her breasts were small and firm and perfect and her waist could have been encircled with his two hands.

On her left forearm—the arm he had struck—was an ugly, swelling bruise.

"Put on that jacket," Storm said.

"A second ago you tried to jerk it off by main strength," the girl said, quietly.

Storm stooped and retrieved the jacket. He held it while the girl slipped into it awkwardly, favoring her injured arm.

Storm nodded to the chair beside his desk. "Sit down and we'll get to the bottom of this. You stowed away last night, I presume. Did you take Cadet Thomas' place?"

"That's right," the girl said.

"Where is Cadet Thomas now?"

"At my apartment. That is, he was there. I presume he has waked by now. He probably has a horrible head."

"You drugged him, took his uniform and papers and came aboard. Why?"

The girl said "Did you ever know a man named Thatcher?"

"Thatcher?" Storm looked at the girl closely. "Yes, I knew a man by that name. He accompanied Commander Griffith to Jupiter eleven years ago. He remained there with Griffith to die."

The girl sprang to her feet. "No! That's a lie. He can't be dead."

"You knew him?" Storm said quietly.

The girl sat down again and her deep eyes grew bitter. "Yes, I knew him," she whispered. "I loved him. I was seventeen then and we were going to be married."

"You came on this trip hoping to find him alive?"

"There's a chance, isn't there?" the girl said. "Don't you see, I had to take it."

"No, I don't," Storm said harshly. "You've ruined a young man's career, you've forced yourself on a trip where you'll cause trouble, just on the thin chance that your fiancée might still be alive." He rang impatiently for his chief medical officer. "What's your name?" he said.

"Margo."

Storm sat in silence, a heavy frown on his face, until the ship's medical officer appeared. He was a portly, gray-haired man with very red cheeks, which got even redder when Storm explained the situation to him.

"Well, well," he said, peering down at the girl as if she were some hitherto undiscovered fauna. "Well, well," he added.

"I understand what you mean," Storm said drily. "Put her into a compartment away from the run of ship's business, and take a look at her arm. She will receive her meals there, and I'll have a guard posted to see that she stays put. Also, you'd better inform the crew of this development. Give them all the facts. I don't want a lot of stupid gossip and speculation started."

"Very well," the medical officer said. He nodded to the girl, who had gotten to her feet, and said, "Just come along with me, please." He started to offer her his arm, but seeing Storm's frown, cleared his throat and proceeded her from the room.

The girl paused. She looked at

Storm and there was pity in her smile. "You've never loved anyone, have you?"

"You are excused," Storm said firmly, and turned to his desk.

CHAPTER III

THEY LANDED on Jupiter sixteen days later. Storm set to work immediately to convert a tiny section of the planet into an efficient space base. The men were restless after the enforced inactivity of the trip and needed a period of diversion. But Storm drove them with out let-up. He knew the danger; but he made no man his confidant.

They had landed in the shadow of an immense mountain. The weather was biting cold, the ground hard as flint.

The *Astro Star II* was unloaded and a headquarters building erected for Storm, and his records and graphs. Prefabricated dwellings were set up in a semi-circle about Storm's quarters, and towers were erected to hold the great lamps which bathed the area in warming light. Everything necessary for comfort and efficiency had been built on Earth and shipped in parts aboard the *Astro Star II*.

Storm ordered a separate hut built for the girl, Margo, and saw to it that she was lodged there with as much comfort as possible, although his bitterness toward her had not diminished.

When the encampment was made, Storm ordered the fighter space ships uncrated and assembled by a crew working days, while a night shift started the work of clearing a field, sinking blast-off tubes, and preparing a maintenance section.

The mood and keynote of the place was work. Storm drove the men, but drove himself twice as hard. He was

everywhere at once, keeping an eye on all details, and occasionally throwing his big shoulder against a stanchion that refused to budge, or taking specifications into his office and working through the night to correct errors, or to adjust them to fit an emergency.

Temper grew short. The men complained to their immediate superiors, but those officers were afraid to pass the complaints on to Storm. They knew what his reaction would be. He drove the work on by sheer will, and he kept himself going with black coffee liberally laced with whiskey.

He had a telescope set up in his office, and this was focused on a visi-screen which he had taken from the *Astro Star II*. Storm spent part of each day studying the visi-screen. He made notes occasionally and consulted his charts. When he came away from the telescope everyone knew it was time to look busy. His temper was apt to be shortest then.

THIRTEEN days after the landing, the girl, Margo, came to his office. She had tried to see him every day since they arrived but he had been too busy. This time she walked in the door and planted herself beside his desk.

"I must speak to you," she said.

Storm looked up from his work. He needed a shave and his eyes were tired. He saw that she had made herself a costume of sorts from camouflage material. She wore black leather boots, shorts made of yellow canvas, and a leather vest. Her legs were slim and shapely and her short black hair was brushed back above her ears in small, flaring wings. Except for the bitter darkness of her eyes, and the sadness of the mouth, she was an exciting woman.

"What do you want?" he said,

his voice blunt and unfriendly.

"I came here to find Thatcher," she said. "I—I want to look for him. Please let me go."

"No; once and for all, no!" Storm said, and slammed his fist down on his desk top. "You'd get lost and we'd have to take valuable men away from important work to look for you."

"Don't you have any heart at all?" she cried, and caught his arm as he got to his feet. "I must know if he's alive or dead. I've got to search for him."

Storm smiled mirthlessly. "You're on a planet roughly ten times the size of Earth. Where would you start to look for this man?"

"You were here with him and Commander Griffith," Margo said breathlessly. "You'd know where to look. Are we in the same area now?"

"We are within a hundred square mile area of where we landed eleven years ago," Storm said. "But what good does that do? A hundred square miles is as vast a million square miles when you're on foot."

"You aren't going to send out a searching party?"

"No," Storm said flatly.

"What is so important about this work you're doing?" Margo cried. "You're killing your men, digging holes and working all night to get space ships ready. Is that more important than looking for human beings who still may be alive, who may need help?"

"My job comes first," Storm said, angrily. "Now get back to your quarters."

Margo stood facing him, her breasts rising and falling under her quick breathing. Her eyes were flashing and Storm was suddenly acutely conscious of her as a woman. He saw the smooth swelling sweetness of her breasts, the long supple

lines of her bare legs, the smooth column of her throat.

They were alone in a vacuum then into which nothing else could penetrate. Outside, the noises of work seemed distant and faint.

She came closer to him and suddenly her arms were around his neck and her mouth was pressed against his and her slender body strained against him. Storm felt a sharp desperate need that drove everything else from his mind.

And then he suddenly tore her arms from his neck and flung her away from him. She fell to the floor and began to sob.

Storm wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, his face black and bitter. "You thought I had a price, didn't you? You thought to buy me as you would buy a hungry man with a beefsteak. Get out!"

When he was alone he went into the bedroom and splashed cold water over his hands and face, and rubbed himself dry with a coarse towel. Then, he poured a canteen cup full of black coffee and dumped four ounces of whisky into it. He drank it down in three gulps and then adjusted the telescope and turned his eyes on the void....

He was still at the scope when McDonald, his chief engineer, entered. They exchanged perfunctory salutes and McDonald said, "The fighter ships are ready, sir. We had some trouble with the tubes on number three ship, but it's all cleared up."

"Good," Storm said. "Then we can blast-off any time now?"

"Well...yes, but I don't know that it would be the right thing."

"What do you mean?" Storm asked sharply.

"The men, sir. They're tired, worn

out. If we start patrols now, it'll mean keeping extra crews at the field, plus the pilots and crew members for the flying—"

Storm lit a cigar and glanced almost involuntarily at the visi-screen. Then he turned back to McDonald. "I'm not a martinet for the fun of it," he said. "But it is necessary that we use the men up to their last ounce of strength. That's all there is to it."

"Very well, sir," McDonald said. "The ships are ready."

"Fine. You've done good work. Tell the flight captains to report to me here immediately."

THERE WERE four flight captains assigned to the *Astro Star II* to pilot the fighter ships she carried and these men were in Storm's office within five minutes. Boyd, a stocky tow-head; Miller, a gangling, sleepy looking man with lightning reflexes; Carney, a grinning Irishman; and Larry Masterson, looking like a sullen angel—stood before Storm, who was seated at his desk.

The captains were tired now, their clothes dusty, their eyes bloodshot, and they needed shaves, baths and sleep.

Storm's first words caused an almost imperceptible sigh from all four men.

"Regular patrols will start tonight. Two ships will cruise this area continuously. During a change of relief, one ship will remain out, well away from the planet, and continue to reconnoiter, while the two ships of the next shift get away."

"What are we supposed to be looking for?" Larry Masterson said, sarcastically.

Storm ignored his tone. He turned, faced the visi-screen and pointed to a milky chain of star clusters in its upper left corner.

"You know something about Galaxy X, I presume?"

Three captains nodded, but Larry said, "The old bogey man, eh?"

Storm looked at him and said, "Men a damn sight smarter than you, Captain, think otherwise." He turned to the screen again. "Fifteen years ago we knew there was a life force in this galaxy. Commander Griffith proved to his own satisfaction that sections of this vast universe were at war with other sections of it. He theorized that one section might win a decisive victory and then turn its war-like attentions toward Earth.

"Commander Griffith was called a crackpot, of course. But time has proven him right. There is one section of the galaxy in the ascendancy now. That section has been massing its life units along a chain of stars on the earth-side of the galaxy. Our mission is to patrol the area between Jupiter and the galaxy, to watch what happens to that star-chain on this side of the galaxy, and to relay our information to Earth."

"You say this starts tonight?" Larry said.

"Yes," Storm said, standing. "Why?"

LARRY LOOKED at the other three captains, and then squared his shoulders. His curly blond hair hung over his forehead and his face was smudged with dirt. "I'll speak for myself then," he said. "We're worn out with this damn work here. We need a day or two to get rested."

Storm laughed harshly. "You boasted to me once of loving to fly, of knowing what it was all about, of liking the Space Arm. Sure! You liked flying fat admirals and their wives on trips around the moon. You

liked the idea of being a space flyer. You like the uniform. That's all the Space Arm has been for the last fifteen years. A repository of incompetents. Well, times change. We're going to work here and do our job. And the patrols will start tonight and continue twenty-four hours every day that were here. That's all, gentlemen."

Larry stared at Storm and his face and eyes were rebellious, hot. But he shrugged finally and strode from the office.

Storm sat at his desk for a few moments studying the visi-screen. He lifted his cup and drank a last mouthful of cold coffee and whisky, then ran a tired hand across his forehead. It was four in the afternoon. He went into his bedroom and threw himself down on the cot, an arm across his eyes. The fighter ships wouldn't blast-off for two or three hours yet, he estimated. Time for him to get some sleep. He closed his burning eyes.

But sleep wouldn't come. He thought of Margo, of the feel of her body against his, of the smoothness of her skin, the womanly sweep of her hips and breasts....

Storm clenched his big hands and tossed restlessly on the cot. She had said once to him that he had never loved! That was both right and wrong. He had loved and loved ardently, but the object of his passion was a cold abstraction. He had loved Earth. He had wanted it to be free and safe. But nothing had come from that love but bitterness and shame.

At last without warning sleep came. His body triumphed. The swirling weary thoughts were conquered by the needs of bone and muscle. He slept deeply, dreamlessly, an arm across his eyes, one leg trailing on the floor....

CHAPTER IV

A SHOUT penetrated Storm's sleep. Another brought him to full wakefulness. He swung himself up and was striding into his office when the door flew open and a cadet dashed in, his face and eyes terrified.

"What is it?" Storm snapped.

"They're coming up the hill," the cadet gasped. "Major McDonald sent me to get you. He—"

Storm shoved past the cadet and stepped outside. Directly ahead of him, about two hundred yards away, a slope began that led down into a broad valley. Storm had gone over the valley carefully the first day they arrived and found nothing but the usual purple-tinted, flint-like soil, and occasional tufts of vegetation tougher than steel wire.

Now Storm saw a knot of his men at the crest of the slope, and several men running back toward the compound.

He started to run.

Major McDonald turned as he charged up and Storm was shocked at the ghastly pallor of the engineer's face. The man couldn't speak. He waved to Storm and pointed toward the valley.

Storm trotted up the sharp rise to the crest of the hill and looked out at the valley, and the sight that met his eyes brought an icy film of perspiration to his face.

Coming toward him with the inexorability of a glacier, were hordes of great metal monsters, rank after rank of them, stretching down into the valley as far as his eye reached. The clanking, grinding noise they made carried clearly on the dank cold air, and there was something in their progress, an inevitability in

their approach, that raised the hackles on his neck.

They were moving faster than he had first judged. Within five minutes the vanguard of the weird creatures would reach the spot where the Earthmen were standing. Storm could see them clearly, now make out the details of their construction.

They stood six feet tall, with arms and legs attached in a semblance of the human form, and above the broad flat shoulders were bucket-like heads cut in square ugly angles, with slits for mouth and eyes.

Light from the artificial suns at the compound reflected off the rows of rivets on the machines, and as they moved forward toward Storm they winked and flashed as if charged with electricity.

Storm drew his heat gun and took careful aim on one of the foremost robots.

He fired a beam that hit the creature below its left knee joint. The metal dissolved and the robot fell ponderously to the ground where it lay like a broken toy.

But the remaining horde continued its inevitable, engulfing march.

"It won't do any good to shoot them," McDonald said, desperately.

"No," Storm said. "Not with hand weapons, at any rate." He swung around to survey the situation. Men were coming out of their huts at the compound and staring toward the hill where Storm stood. To his right, a mile off, was the space ship field with the blast-off tubes pointing up to the sky. And beyond that was the mighty bulk of the *Astro Star* II. A tight grimace of satisfaction touched Storm's face as he saw the giant atomic cannons protruding from the hull of their ship.

"We'll retreat to the *Astro Star*," he snapped. "We can burn these robots down with one sweep of those

starboard cannons."

"That's right," McDonald said. "I didn't think of it!"

THEY BEGAN a careful but hasty retreat. Storm trotted ahead and rounded up all crew members at the compound and told them to head for the *Astro Star*. The girl, Margo, came out of her hut and he sent her along with the advance section from the crew.

Now the leading robots had topped the crest of the hill and were lumbering along toward the compound. But half-way there they changed direction and continued after Storm and his followers, who were bringing up the rear of the retreat.

"The damn things are after us!" McDonald shouted. "They're passing up the compound entirely."

"Let's keep ahead of them, then," Storm said grimly. He didn't know whether the robots' intentions were lethal; but he didn't intend to investigate that possibility yet.

Suddenly a shout sounded at the head of the ragged column of Earthmen.

"Good God!" McDonald cried.

Storm swung around and saw that another column of the massive robots had appeared on the slope below the space-ship base. This contingent swarmed in seemingly endless numbers past the blast-off tubes and surged along to meet the first group.

Storm and his crew were caught in a pinchers movement. They were cut off from the *Astro Star*.

There was only one course left to take, Storm saw. That was to make a right-angle turn and attempt to get around the first horde and back to the compound, where there were steel shelters and rifles.

Storm heard a scream then went through him like a cold knife. Wheeling, he saw that the girl, Margo,

had fallen in the pathway of the advancing robots. She tried to rise, then fell back to the ground. One crew member started back for her. The rest of the crew were rushing to get out of the closing jaws of the robot attack.

Storm said to McDonald, "Get to the compound, and into my office as fast as you can. You're in charge."

HE TURNED then and raced back toward Margo. The ground was uneven and treacherous beneath his feet, and he saw with horror that he and the leading robot were going to reach the girl at about the same time. The crew member who had gone to her aid was a mechanic, a husky fearless man, but his face was ashen as he tugged at the girl's arm.

Storm whipped out his ray gun and burned the metal legs off the charging robot. The creature fell with a metallic crash, both great arms still reaching out for the two humans.

That gave them ten seconds.

Storm saw that Margo's face was white and drawn. She was pushing the crew member away from her.

"Don't stay with me!" she gasped. "It's my knee. They'll get us both!"

Storm scooped her up in his arms and flipped his gun to the mechanic. "Cover us," he shouted to the man, and ran as fast as he could to get clear of the engulfing tide of robots.

There was a pathway now about fifty yards between the two waves of metal monsters, and through this rapidly narrowing channel Storm dashed with the girl. Beside him the mechanic was picking off robots, first on one side, then the other.

The robots, Storm saw, were slow in changing course. On a straightaway they could lumber ahead at surprising speed; but now some of them were starting to turn to fol-

low him, and they performed this maneuver clumsily, haltingly.

It was this delay that gave him a chance to get away. He dodged through the last of the creatures as the two waves came together with a crack. Some of the robots were bowled over by the impact, and the others milled and churned around as they attempted to get clear and follow Storm.

By that time Storm was twenty-five yards up the side of the mountain, and from there he cut left and ran alongside the unorganized mass of robots. Some of the creatures on the fringe of the horde turned and began a clumsy ascent of the rocky hill; but Storm outdistanced them easily.

The compound loomed ahead. Every steel door was closed tight, and from every window squat deadly atomic rifles were thrust. Nothing stirred except the slowly moving muzzles that covered Storm, the girl, and the mechanic.

Storm trotted straight to his headquarters. His arms were aching and each breath seared his lungs painfully.

The door swung open and they were inside. The girl was lifted from Storm's arm and carried into his bedroom. Someone thrust a rifle into his hands.

Questions, babbled questions, beat at his ears. He held up a hand and called for silence in his harsh voice.

"I don't know what they are, how they operate, or who sent them," he said. "So don't worry about that now. By God, we're in for a fight! Don't waste a round. Shoot them in bunches if you can. Maybe we can build a wall of disabled robots that the rest can't climb."

He told McDonald to call him when the first robots appeared in the compound. Then he went into

his bedroom. The girl lay on his cot. She was pale and her mouth was twisted with pain.

"You said I'd cause trouble," she said weakly.

"Never mind that," He straightened her leg and then felt her knee gently. "Nothing broken," he said. "A bad wrench."

"It doesn't matter. What in the name of God are they?"

"I don't know. I'm going now. Are you afraid."

"Yes," she said quietly. "But it's all right."

"Good girl," he said. He felt sorry for her. This was bad enough for a man. He put his hand awkwardly on her forehead in a gesture of comfort then got to his feet.

He was turning to the door when McDonald's voice, loud and fear-laden, shouted his name.

STORM hurried through the door into his office and pushed his way through the knots of men who were clustered there. McDonald was at a window, staring out into the compound, his jaw slack with astonishment.

Storm edged him aside. In the compound robots were drawn up in ranks on both sides of the encampment. Advancing through their center was the weirdest sight Storm had encountered in his life.

Leading a squad of robots was a tall, voluptuously proportioned girl, a magnificent Amazon with flaming red hair and ice-green eyes. She wore a brief, tight-fitting garment and a long purple cape that swirled back and away from her powerful shoulders. Her bare legs were slender and graceful; but the fine muscles that rippled in her calves as she advanced was an indication of steel-spun strength.

From a jeweled belt at her waist

hung a gleaming tubular object from which poured a stream of light. In one gauntleted hand she carried a ray gun of ancient make, and the other was raised above her head in a defiant gesture as she stopped spread-legged before Storm's quarters.

"Come out, you crawling cowards!" she shouted in a brassy, full-lunged voice. "There is nothing here but a helpless girl and a few clumsy figures of steel."

Storm had hardly dared believe his eyes when he saw the girl. Now he jerked open the door and strode into the compound. He stopped a dozen feet from the girl, a hard smile on his face.

The girl watched him and the expression of belligerence on her face changed slowly to one of bewilderment.

"Yes," Storm said. "We know each other, Karen. You were eleven when I last saw you."

"You're Storm," the girl said slowly. "You came here with my father on that trip."

Storm nodded. He could hardly believe he wasn't living some strangely vivid dream. This was Karen Griffith, daughter of Commander Griffith, who had been left on Jupiter eleven years ago. Karen had not only survived; she had thrived.

"Your father?" Storm said, quietly.

"Dead," the girl said. "He and Ben Thatcher, and my mother have been gone a long while now. That pleases you, doesn't it?" she said, in a savage voice. "You and all the rest of Earth cowards. You deserted him, left him here to die."

"I did not desert your father," Storm said in an even voice. "I was dragged aboard the ship in irons and taken back to Earth by force."

"Lies, lies, lies!" the girl cried

imperiously. She stepped back a pace, her hand dropping to the tube at her waist as members of Storm's crew crowded out behind him.

"Hold it!" Storm said sharply. He didn't know what she intended to do; but he surmised the tube controlled the robots in some manner. "We're not your enemies, Karen. We are here to continue your father's work. Earth is in danger Karen, grave danger. The danger your father foresaw and attempted to prepare Earth to face, is at hand—so close at hand that days may mean the difference of life and death to the entire planet."

"You expect me to care about the fate of Earth?" the girl cried scornfully. "I would cheerfully hasten Earth's destruction with every means at my command."

"Your father didn't teach you that attitude," Storm said.

"My father was a poor, idealistic fool," Karen said, laughing. "He held no malice against Earth. He talked to me of tolerance of forgiveness. I listened and when he finished I spat at his feet. I saw what they had done to him, I saw the reward he received for his service, his dedication, his very life! There is no forgiveness, no charity in me, Storm—for you or your kind!"

"We face each other as enemies then?" Storm said heavily.

KAREN LAUGHED, a ringing defiant laugh. "Yes, by Heaven, we do!" She turned a significant glance at the column of silent robots lined up on both sides of her, and stretching back for what seemed miles. Then she faced Storm again. "You've seen my pets at work. I warn you, Storm, I do not intend to make war. My life is my own, clean, alone, and unfettered. I will keep it that way with every weapon I control!

"I will not interfere with you. But if you seek me out or attempt to disrupt my life, I will not rest until every man of yours is ground to powder beneath the feet of my army. Do you understand?"

Storm nodded. His face was dark, bitter, as he struggled against a mighty anger. He would have liked to get his hands on this imperious, defiant woman for ten seconds. But the thing that enraged him most was that she had every right in the world to her opinion and feeling. Why should she help Earth?

There was no reason. The girl had seen the gratitude of Earth, knew its pettiness. Who could blame her for the way she felt?

"Very well, Karen," he said. "We have our work to do, and you have a right to your own life. They won't come in conflict."

"They had better not," Karen said, with an ominous smile.

Still smiling she fingered the tube at her waist and the army of silent automatons began to rearrange themselves in formation. Karen backed away from the compound, her cool, ice-green eyes flicking contemptuously across the groups of silent men who watched her, and when she reached the crest of the slope, she wheeled and disappeared.

The last they saw was the flash of her purple cape, elusive and mysterious as smoke on the horizon.

CHAPTER V

STORM TURNED and nodded to the crew members clustered at the entrance of his office. "Carry on with your regular work, men." He hesitated a moment, then added grimly. "You know as much about this thing as I do."

Entering his office, Storm found McDonald standing by his desk. The

engineer was grave.

"Two men were killed at the blast-off chute," he said. "They didn't get started fast enough."

"I see." Storm sat down at his desk and rubbed his forehead tiredly. He had been known in the service as a steel-hard, void-cold commander; but no one knew the effort it cost him to preserve that front of impersonality.

McDonald filled a cup with coffee, poured whisky into it and brought it to Storm.

"You need this," he said. "You can't last much longer at this pace, you know. Why don't you rest tonight?"

Storm took the coffee and sipped it. He was touched by McDonald's concern, and he didn't know quite what to say. "There's too much to do," he said finally. "But thanks just the same."

McDonald nodded and left the office. Storm finished the coffee and stood up and walked into his bedroom. Margo still lay on the bed. She was staring at the ceiling. He saw that she had been crying.

"Knee hurt?" he said.

"No, it's stiff, that's all."

"Will you let me tape it for you?"

"Yes. Maybe I can walk then."

Storm got out a first-aid kit and pulled a chair beside the cot. He sat down and applied a tape cast to the injured knee.

"That may hurt a little," he said.

"No, it's all right."

He fought down a feeling of annoyance. "Well, something's hurting you. You're crying."

"She had a pretty loud voice. I heard about Thatcher."

"Oh," Storm said. He felt clumsy. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. It was the end of a dream. All dreams do end, don't they?"

"I don't know," Storm said, standing. "I think you can walk now."

She stood and tested the leg by walking haltingly to the door. "It's all right, I guess. Thanks, Storm." Turning, she limped across his office and he heard the door slam behind her."

Storm threw himself on the cot and pressed both hands against his aching eyes. There was faint, delicate fragrance in the room, a subtle essence as elusive as a smile.

He lay there, staring at the ceiling, stony-faced, wondering what had happened to him....

HALF AN hour later he pushed up on one elbow, frowning. Something was wrong. It took him a moment to decide what it was. There was no sound of activity from the compound. The normal, everyday bustle of work was lacking.

Storm walked out of his office and saw half a dozen men talking in a small group. Other groups were clustered in the compounds. No one was working.

The talk faded as he glanced from group to group, his jaw hardening grimly.

"I told you men to carry on your regular work," he said harshly. "Didn't you understand that?"

Larry Masterson, the young flight captain, moved out from a group and sauntered over to Storm. He stopped and lit a cigarette and blew smoke in the air. His blond hair hung over his forehead and there was a sardonic smile at his lips.

"We don't see much reason to get back to work, Commander Storm," he said mildly. "We're tired of being driven like dogs to satisfy your ego. We don't believe the fairy stories about Galaxy X, and we don't intend to invite more attacks from those murderous robots."

"You've said enough to hang yourself, Captain," Storm said grimly. He raked his eyes over the crew members clustered in the compound. "I'll give you exactly ten seconds to get on with your work!"

He swung his arm up and watched the second hand on his watch move inexorably across the dial. Larry Masterson yawned elaborately.

Storm put his arm down and squared his big shoulders. "So it's mutiny, is it?" he said quietly.

"Oh, no, not at all," Larry Masterson said. "We think you're unfit to command this squadron, Commander. When we return to Earth it is you who will stand trial, not us. Now, we are relieving you of command."

"You don't know what you're doing!" Storm shouted.

"Yes, we do," Larry said, his voice hard. "We heard the pact you made with that murderous girl, and we intend to change it. We'll take her robots and put them to work for us, and we'll see that she causes no trouble."

Storm spun suddenly and dove for the door of his office, but half a dozen crew members sprang after him and caught him before he got inside. Struggling furiously he was borne to the ground.

The crew must have prepared for the attack, Storm realized, for steel hoops were produced, slipped about his arms and tightened until he was pinioned helplessly. Then he was jerked to his feet.

"You will be kept a prisoner until we return to Earth," Larry Masterson said. "Your treatment will depend on how you behave yourself."

"You'll die for this!" Storm raged.

"No. I'm merely trying to save all of our lives."

McDonald, the tall, graying en-

gineer, came forward slowly from the ranks and stood beside Storm. "I'm too old for mutiny," he said in a cold precise voice. "Commander Storm is my superior officer. I recognize no other."

"Very well," Larry said drily. "You may accompany your commander into honorable imprisonment."

He was turning away when a clear but firm voice said, "If you move I will blast you to hell!"

Storm looked up and saw the girl, Margo, her face ashen, clenching a heavy gun in both hands and pointing it unwaveringly at Larry.

"Don't be a fool," he called to her.

She stood at the edge of the compound, a slight, determined figure. "Release him," she said.

She didn't see the man slipping up behind her, nor did she see his hand until it came down suddenly and sharply, knocking the gun from her grasp. By then it was too late. She sank to the ground, weeping.

Larry shrugged. "Take these three down to the blast-off field and lock them up there. We've got work to do...."

CHAPTER VI

THE PLACE they were taken to was a steel building used to house tools and supplies. It was a one-storied unit about twelve by fourteen feet, with glass windows that were strong as chrome steel.

Storm stood at one window staring across the mile-long sweep leading to the compound. He could see men moving about even at that distance, for the atmosphere was burned clear by the powerful sun lamps.

He stood there unmoving, his face black with rage, his eyes hot. He wanted nothing else in life but to

get his hands on Larry's throat.

McDonald joined him. "They may change their minds, you know," he said. "Some of those men have sense. When they start thinking this over they may snap out of it."

"I didn't ask for a recapitulation," Storm said harshly.

McDonald cleared his throat. "Very well, sir," he said, and sat down with his back to the wall.

"Bite and snarl, that's all you know," Margo said hotly. "He stuck with you, didn't he, while the rest of your men mutinied?"

"Do you think he deserves some special credit for doing what he swore he would do when he was commissioned in the service?" Storm said.

"He wouldn't get it from you, at least," Margo said. "You think people should be made of steel, knowing nothing but duty, having no doubts, or problems, or anything but their dedicated service to Earth."

"Am I a monster because I want Earth to be safe?" Storm said.

"No," Margo said in a weary voice. "But you've never learned that two people can want the same thing in different ways. You treat disagreement with scorn instead of respect. Your men want what you want, Storm, but you drove them away."

"Shut up!" Storm said angrily.

"That's how you settle all issues. Very well, I'll shut up."

Storm watched the compound, his face stony. Soon he saw a figure leave there and head toward them, toward the blast-off field. When the man neared Storm recognized him as Boyd, the fighter pilot.

"Where are you going, Boyd?" he shouted.

Boyd grinned. "Just for a pleasure jaunt, my friend," he said, and continued on. A little later Storm heard

a ship take off under auxiliary power. He peered upward and saw the slim fighter streaking upward and then bank toward the mountains.

He frowned and rubbed his jaw trying to guess what the men were planning.

HALF AN hour later twelve men left the compound. They carried packs. The man in the lead walked like Larry, but at that distance, Storm couldn't be sure.

For another hour he watched the compound, looking for more indications that might help him decide what was happening; but nothing of significance occurred. Men strolled across the compound to the hall, or moved in and out of their dwelling units, in normal, casual fashion.

He lit one of his stubby black cigars and glanced up at the thick, green sky. High and almost directly above the compound he saw a small black globe settling toward the ground. He watched it for a moment without expression; and then his hands tightened instinctively.

"McDonald," he said. "Come here."

Storm pointed to the descending globe. He didn't speak. McDonald moved closer to the window and peered upward, a slight frown on his face.

They could see the object more clearly now. It was circular, saucer-shaped, and was spinning slowly as it descended. From ports on its narrow sides bright lights flashed.

"Well?" Storm said. He kept his voice quiet, even.

"I don't know," McDonald said slowly. "Look at the compound."

The men at the compound had come out of their steel huts, were gazing upward at the settling globe. Some of them were waving.

"Fools!" Storm raged. He beat a fist into his palm. "The hopeless,

damned fools! Don't they realize—"

The door behind them opened and a corporal came in, plainly worried. He looked at Storm awkwardly. "Sir," he said, "There's a-- You've seen it, I guess."

Storm didn't answer. "Let me have your binoculars."

"Yes, sir," the corporal said, with relief in his voice. It was obvious he was willing, even anxious, for Storm to resume responsibility and command.

Storm studied the globe with the glasses. It was several hundred yards above the ground now, and moving slowly. He saw nothing revealing at close range. The ship was made of black metal, and the lights flashing from discs on its side were bright and dazzling.

As he watched the discs revolved and beams of light struck down toward the compound.

McDonald shouted involuntarily. "Watch out!"

Storm swung the glasses to the compound and saw that his men had been scattered to the ground like broken dolls. The light from the still-settling ship played over them, flashed into the buildings, over the whole area, bathing it brilliant radiance.

The men under the light didn't move; they lay still in the undignified sprawl of death.

"Oh God!" Margo cried. "What happened to them, Storm?"

STORM FAILED to answer. He watched the ship as it stopped fifty yards above the ground, then, after a wait of several minutes, dropped gently to rest in the compound.

A powerful tension grew in Storm. It wasn't fear! It was anticipation! He knew with calm strong certainty that he was about to meet the thing he

had fought against all his life. He had never known the enemy; he had battled shadows. Now the curtain was lifted, the antagonists could face each other, measuringly, appraisingly, finally.

Apertures appeared in the sides of the ship and things moved out of it and onto the rocky ground of Jupiter.

Storm centered his glasses on the first of the creatures, and hot anger coursed through him as he made out details: fat, toad-like bodies, gray, scabrous skins, pendulous heads, and great round stumps of feet.

"It's incredible!" McDonald whispered. "They're—they're *old*, older than hell."

"The last crawling filth of a dead universe," Storm said. "They want the plains and flowers of Earth now. They need its sun and air and young vigor."

They counted five of the creatures. They watched in fascinated silence as the invaders moved sluggishly about the compound, in and out of the buildings. Then, after this examination, the creatures came together for several minutes near their ship. Finally four of them left the compound and traveled in the direction of the slope where the robots had first appeared—and where the twelve crewmen had gone.

Once started they moved with greater speed, and in a matter of seconds they had disappeared over the crest of the hill.

For several minutes no one spoke. Storm glanced at Margo and saw that her cheeks were wet but her eyes were flashing defiance.

"Good," he said gently. "Maybe if you thought about them all of your life you might turn into the kind of person I am. It's not a nice thing to turn into, of course. Nobody likes you very much." He turned to the

corporal, who snapped to painful attention. "Let me have your rifle," he said.

Holding the rifle in readiness, Storm stepped carefully through the door and dropped to his stomach. He wriggled ahead for perhaps a hundred yards until he reached a slight rise, from where he could clearly see the creature who had remained behind in the compound.

He settled himself on his stomach and put the stock of the rifle into his shoulder, enjoying the feel of cool metal against his cheek. He sighted on the toad-like creature and began to squeeze the trigger gently.

The creature moved back and forth restlessly, as if sensing that something was wrong. From its waist hung a small disc which glowed brightly. The beam from the disc flashed about in a wide questing circle as the creature moved in an aimless circle.

Suddenly the ray of light flashed to a greater length and leaped across the plain toward the blast-off field, toward Storm.

Storm fired a blast of heat at the creature, as light from the disc struck him full force. For an instant a terrible, unendurable pain swept over him. Then it was gone, and he clambered to his feet, shaking his head like an injured animal.

The creature was lying on the ground, and attempting to move, to crawl. Storm fired two more blasts and the movement stopped.

McDonald came hurrying up, caught Storm's arm. "That light—what was it?" he gasped.

"I don't know. But another tenth of a second and I'd have been gone. My first shot got him just in time. Let's get going."

THE COMPOUND was a nightmarish scene of death. Men lay

sprawled on the ground, slumped at workbenches, or collapsed in their cots. No one was alive.

Storm made directly for his headquarters. Inside he snapped on the visi-screen above his desk. McDonald was at his heels.

They stood looking at the void, at the mightily jeweled star-chin on the Earth side of Galaxy X. Beneath it, several inches on the screen, but billions of miles in the void, was a shadowy cluster of black dots, thousands of them, poised in space.

Storm spoke matter-of-factly, bitterly. "You are looking at the space fleet of Galaxy X. They're ready. Are we, McDonald?"

He turned without cutting off the machine and went outside. There were no clear thoughts in his mind. He didn't know what they *could* do.

He heard a ship overhead and instinctively he ducked; but the whine of the auxiliaries was familiar, and when it flashed into sight he recognized it as one of their own fighters, the one Boyd had left in an hour or so before.

Storm watched the ship circle for a mooring at the blast-off field, and then he trotted in that direction, the beat rifle still in his hands.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN STORM, McDonald and the girl had first been led away, Larry had outlined his plans quickly to Boyd, the squarely-built towhead, and Carney, the Irishman. They were in Storm's office.

"For better or worse we're in charge," he said crisply. "Our necks depend on what we do with our authority. If we do a sensible job, it will prove we were right. If not, we'll hang as mutineers."

"Hell, everybody is back of us,"

Carney said, his voice shaking.

"Okay, fine. First we have to find the girl, the one Storm called Karen. We've got to find out how she controls those robots, and make sure she doesn't use them against us. Here's my idea: Those robots must return to some central area and they're probably still on the way there. Boyd, you take a fighter ship and cruise around this area until you pick up the trail. Meanwhile Carney and I will take a party in the same general direction the robots took. When you establish contact, radio us the directions and we'll close in on the girl. Okay?"

There were a few questions, a few details to iron out, then Boyd left on the double for the blast-off tubes. Larry told Carney to select a party of twelve men and pack enough supplies to last them a week.

When both men had gone, Larry lit a cigarette and sat down in Storm's chair. He frowned at the tip of his cigarette for a few minutes. He had been trained in the best ideals of the service. Mutineer in his eyes was a mad dog. Yet he had taken that step, confident he was right. The babbling about Galaxy X had never impressed him. It was an old scare story of those who wanted Earth to build bigger armies, bigger space ships. It was one of those semi-sacrosanct fables that everyone discussed gravely, but no one believed. At least none of the cadets in his class had believed it, and they were a well-informed, sophisticated group.

Suddenly he realized it was Commander Storm's desk he was sitting at and he got up hastily, with the uncomfortable certainty that he didn't belong there.

But that was foolish. Storm would have killed them all with his fanatic's ideas; and if Storm hadn't, then

the girl with the robots might well have.

Larry lit another cigarette and pushed the hair from his eyes. He had had but one quick glimpse of this girl, but something about her, some quality of defiance and arrogance in her attitude, made him eager to see her again, eager to test that steel....

IT WAS AN hour later that he received the first radio message from Boyd. His party was halted near the narrow mouth of a valley. They were about ten Earth miles from the compound, and the air was stingingly cold, while the flakes of flint like dust hurled by the wind made their progress slow and difficult.

Larry raised a jubilant hand as Boyd's deep sure voice came over the portable unit:

"It's the valley ahead of you, Captain. Bear right, into an opening in the mountain. That's where every robot has disappeared."

"Check," Larry snapped with satisfaction.

The men with him had heard the message and they pressed forward with renewed enthusiasm as Larry led the slender column through the narrow opening of the valley. His eyes swept along the right side of the vast purple mountain that soared above their heads to the green-colored sky.

He found the opening Boyd had spotted about a quarter of a mile from the valley entrance, and its appearance immediately suggested Hirculean labor combined with intelligence. The aperture was fifty yards square and led to a shaft that seemingly stretched into the heart of the mountain, a tunnel with silk-smooth walls and gracefully arched

ceiling high above the stone flooring.

They followed the shaft for nearly half a mile before it turned to the right. As they followed this new route they heard a swelling, murmuring sound that seemed to emanate from the heart of the mountain.

An iridescent glow from the sheer, glass-smooth walls provided illumination as they proceeded cautiously down the gleaming corridor. The sound was becoming more intense now; it was a gigantic humming that echoed from the walls and set up a throbbing in their ears.

Larry glanced at Carney uneasily, then shrugged. There was nothing to do but keep going.

A quarter of a mile ahead they saw that the corridor fanned out on both sides before ending abruptly—leading to nothing but bright and empty space.

They hurried along this last stretch and the swelling sound now filled their heads with an almost intolerable clamor.

Reaching the widening section of the shaft, Larry moved forward more cautiously to the very lip of the floor—until he could look down into the pit where the roaring sounds seemed to originate.

Carney crowded alongside him with the other members of the party as Larry heard a somebody say, "Good God!" in a hushed voice.

HALF A mile below them, and extending as far as they could see, was a mighty vault cut into the granite heart of the mountain. Working deep in that immense pit were thousands and thousands of the ponderous, carefully moving robots.

The sight of that incredible metal army spreading for miles in all directions was enough to catch at their

throats with a nameless horror.

Carney touched Larry's arm and said in an awed voice: "Do you see what they're doing? They're making more robots! Look! There on your left! They're coming off that line, getting up and walking ahead under their own power!"

Larry rubbed a hand over his forehead. He saw squads of the creatures carrying loads of metal, others working with ringing sledges, and that other groups were working at long tables supporting fabulously intricate machines.

"Let's keep going," Larry said to Carney. "We've got to find that girl. You can imagine what would happen if she ever turned *this* loose on us!"

They stood indecisively for a moment at the cross-corridor, above the great pit. Larry finally sent half the party to the left while he, Carney, and four others, proceeded to the right.

At the next cross-corridor Larry selected two men and told them to follow it for half an hour, then return to the main corridor. Again, a quarter of a mile on, he sent two more men down a cross-corridor, while he and Carney continued on alone. For a mile they went ahead; then they came to a third cross-corridor and Larry looked helplessly at Carney.

Carney shouted an answer to the unspoken question on Larry's face. "We might as well follow it. If we find nothing we might as well collect the men and get out of here."

The new corridor did not run straight. Instead it curved back and forth, and was considerably narrower than the one they had just left. As they followed its undulations the noise from the robot factory faded away to a gentle, distant murmur.

Then, as they rounded a corner, Larry caught Carney's arm. Ahead was a wide arched door on the right side of the corridor.

They approached it cautiously. There was no knob or handle but it swung inward slowly, silently, as Larry put his shoulder against it.

Beyond the door was a short, narrow hall that turned to the right and led them to a pair of closed doors.

Larry stopped before them, his heart beating almost audibly.

HE PUT HIS hand against the panel of one and pushed. Through the aperture formed by the opening door he saw a large, high-ceilinged room with gleaming walls and a metal floor that shone like aluminum.

He eased the door open another few inches; and his breath caught as he saw the red-haired girl.

She was lying on a low oval bed in the center of the room and her full, sharply pointed breasts rose and fell with her even breathing. Her eyes were closed, and she was apparently asleep.

Larry glanced at Carney and put a cautioning finger to his lips; and then stepped through the arched doorway into the room. Carney moved quietly at his heels.

The girl who had called herself Karen turned restlessly as they moved toward her. She wore a light silken garment open at the throat and extending halfway to her bare knees. The pale silver light from the walls glinted on her fiery red hair and glazed the milky smoothness of her slender, exquisite legs.

On a table beside the bed Larry saw the belt she had worn the first time he had seen her, and the tube with which she had seemed to con-

trol the robots. Also, close to her hand, was the ancient ray gun.

Carney moved up beside Larry and as he did so his foot slipped on the silk-smooth floor. He lost his balance and fell to one knee with a thud.

The girl sat upright with the instinctive, light-swift reaction of an animal in danger, her icy green eyes flicking across the faces of the two men.

For a second they stared at one another in a tense, breathless silence, and Larry saw the muscles in the girl's arms and legs beginning to coil.

"Calm down, beautiful," he said softly. "We're not going to hurt you."

"I told you not to follow me," the girl said, a slow ominous anger in her voice. "I want nothing from you but to be let alone."

"Cut it out," Larry said curtly. "You're an Earth girl, and you can't live here like this."

"You fool!" the girl cried, and with a flashing movement that caught them both by surprise, she flung herself from the bed and lunged for the ray gun.

Larry dove after her, catching her about the waist as she wheeled, gun in hand, to face them. A bolt of dazzling silent heat shot past his shoulder, as his attack deflected her arm.

Carney closed in on the girl as she struggled with Larry.

"I've got her!" he yelled, lunging for her arm.

But the girl swung Larry about with savage, incredible strength, and Carney's hands closed on empty air. As he stumbled forward she slugged him across the side of the head with the gun barrel. He went down in an inert heap.

LARRY suddenly stepped back from the girl and chopped his hand down on her forearm. The gun clattered to the floor and she lunged at him with a cry of anger and pain.

"Stop it, you hellcat!" Larry panted.

"Never!"

"Okay, you asked for it," Larry said. He caught her arm and pulled her close, then snapped a short hard right to the point of her jaw. She slumped against him, her eyes glazing, and he caught her before she could fall to the floor.

Lifting her in his arms he carried her to the bed, then stripped off his belt, and Carney's, and bound the girl's elbows and ankles.

Breathing hard, he bent over Carney and looked at the ugly lump on his head. The fallen man was breathing, but showed no signs of regaining consciousness.

Larry sat down beside the girl on the bed and waited until her eyes flickered open. For an instant she stared at him without comprehension; then she attempted to move, only to become aware of the bonds at her arms and ankles. A spasm of defiant fury contorted her face and she began to writhe and twist on the bed.

"You'll die for this!" she panted.

Larry held her by both shoulders to keep her from rolling onto the floor. He said, "You're a spoiled and unpleasant brat, Karen. The thing you need is a thorough spanking and a short lecture on the fact that you're not the most important and wonderful person in the universe. Possibly then you might start behaving like a human being."

"I hope I never behave like the humans I've known," the girl cried. "The humans who left my father to

die; humans like you and that clod on the floor who know no rule but strength, no rules but the ones you make. I'd die before I molded myself after you."

Larry felt almost helpless before the blazing fury and conviction in the girl's eyes. In a way, he could see that she had reason behind her attitude.

"Now listen to me just a minute, please," he said, in a calmer voice. "We probably seem like savages to you in one sense. But try to understand our attitude. We're a small group of Earthmen who have been driven to the point of collapse by a neurotic commander. We—"

"You mean Storm?" the girl said. She had ceased struggling, and interest showed in her face.

"That's right. The man is a maniac. So we put him in irons—and took a hell of a chance in doing it! Now we want to get safely back to Earth and present our story to the Earth Federation. Frankly those robots of yours scared us and we intend to make sure they don't attack us again. That's why you find yourself in the spot you're in."

LARRY'S last words were colored with faint sarcasm, but the girl appeared not to notice.

"What is it Storm feared?" she said. "Why did he come here?"

Larry shrugged. "The old familiar bedtime story about Galaxy X. You know, the one they use to frighten children on Earth. Storm, being slightly cracked, eats it up. He'd kill himself and everyone of us to fight this non-existent menace."

"My father often talked of Galaxy X," the girl said. "When—" A troubled frown appeared on her face. "I'm not sure of time anymore. But once he told me he built the robots

to fight for Earth against the galaxy."

Larry saw that her mood had changed, that her attention was arrested by his story. He decided to take advantage of that to get information.

"We saw the robot pit on the way here," he said. "Do those creatures actually *make* themselves, or was I drunk?"

"They make themselves, of course. Father worked for years to make them self-perpetuating. They've gone on since he died, reproducing themselves to the last rivet and coil."

"How are they controlled?"

That question broke the girl's oddly submissive mood. She stared at him as if she had suddenly awakened. Suddenly she strained against her bonds, and cried, "I'll tell you nothing more. Release me at once!"

Larry smiled at her and folded his arms. "You have to learn humility, Karen. I'm not going to release until you tell me what I want to know, and give me your promise you'll behave. Think that over, young lady, while I take a look at my friend."

He bent over Carney, his back to the girl and the tall doorway, and began shaking the man's shoulder gently. Carney stirred and his lids fluttered.

"That's the boy," Larry said.

A sound from the girl caused him to turn quickly. She was staring past him, toward the doorway, and the expression on her face sent a cold tremor of alarm down his spine.

Her face was ashen, her breath laboring in gasps. Her teeth were closed on her lower lip, and a thin trickle of blood stained her chin. But it was her eyes that sent horror into Larry's soul. They were wide, staring, agonized.

Her lips moved, and she whim-

pered, "No!" in complete terror.

LARRY wheeled, still on his knees, and the sight that met his eyes contracted his throat with nauseating horror.

Standing silently in the doorway were four creatures that could have been spawned only in the nightmares of a diseased and ravaged mind.

Leprous gray in color, squat and thick as great toads, they stood on clumsy round feet, while their heads, huge and pendulous, swung slowly back and forth.

They were old, hideously old and evil, and the folds of flesh that hung in putrefying folds and loops over their bodies, looked as if it had been created from slime and filth.

About their waists were belts which supported pale, gleaming discs. The discs glowed with gelid light, their beams playing downward on the floor at their feet.

Larry swallowed dry terror and rose instinctively to his feet. He took a step backward—and then a beam of light flashed upward and caught him in its glare.

Instantly pain, numbing, incredible, maddening pain, flamed through every muscle, tendon and nerve of his body. He was transfixed, held motionless in its grip. He tried to fight, tried to throw himself to the floor, to scream. But the light was binding as a mold of steel. He stood rooted and paralyzed in the dreadful beam until his limbs were on the point of cracking and his skull felt as if it were ready to split like a rotten melon.

From the corner of his straining eyes he saw Carney move suddenly, lunging toward the ray gun on the floor, but as he did a beam of light

from another of the creatures flashed out and Carney screamed—a scream torn from the depths of his soul. Blood streamed from his nose and mouth and he dropped to the floor like an animal crushed by some monstrous weight.

The light receded from the limp, huddled body, and Larry knew he was dead, the life driven from him forever by one touch of the creature's light.

The creatures hadn't yet moved except for the swinging swaying motion of their great heads; but now they advanced slowly into the room, and fixed sunken eyes on the girl.

The light that held Larry in a grip of agony left him suddenly, and he fell to the floor, drained and helpless. From where he lay he could see the girl, see the creatures advancing slowly toward her, their eyes moving over her body as restlessly as ants.

"They're asking me about the robots," she cried brokenly, "Their minds are in mine—like fingers, probing and twisting."

"Good God!" Larry gasped.

"No!" the girl screamed suddenly, drawing back. "No! No! No! I'll tell you nothing, you rotting fiends!"

The intruders were motionless for a moment, but Larry sensed they were communicating with one another.

Then a whimpering cry broke from his lips as one of the creatures moved closer to the bed, and light from the disc at his waist flashed over the girl's slim figure.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TWO bodies lay sprawled at a cross-corridor beside the vast robot pit in the heart of the mountain.

Storm dropped to his knees beside them, saw instantly that both men were dead. He said to McDonald, "We're on the right track."

They stood, Boyd, McDonald, and Storm, staring ahead along the gleaming corridor. Boyd had told Storm of Larry's plans, and they had set out after the twelve-man party, leaving Margo and the corporal behind at the compound.

"These were two of the men Larry took with him, I'm sure," Boyd said.

"Okay, let's keep going. And keep your guns ready," Storm said. "If we find those damn things we'll only get one chance."

They went on, heat guns drawn and held in readiness, until they reached a corridor that ran off in a long curve. In that respect it was different from the other halls they had passed; and for that reason Storm decided to follow it. They were looking for a needle in a haystack, he knew, and their chances of success were slim. But they had to keep on.

As they followed the new course they became aware that the sounds from the pit were fading behind them; and half a mile on they came to a door in the right side of the wall.

Storm glanced at McDonald, a look that told him to be ready for anything, and pushed the door open, slowly. They stepped through the door into another corridor and followed that to a pair of high doors that were standing slightly ajar.

Storm looked into the room, then grabbed Boyd by the arm and jerked him against the wall. McDonald had seen also, and he had ducked down on the opposite side of the corridor.

Ahead, through the door, they saw the four gray monsters from the galaxy standing near a long bed, on

which the red-haired girl lay helplessly bound.

Light from the discs at the waists of the creatures played across her slender straining figure, transforming her hair into a halo of foaming gold and coating the alabaster whiteness of her flesh with shimmering radiance.

Her body was bent in a straining tortured arc. Her bare feet pressed flat against the hard matting of the bed, her head was thrown back in agony.

She was held in the vise-strong grip of the light, helpless as a victim on a rack, and every muscle and tendon of her body quivered and trembled against the incredible agony she was undergoing.

Storm whispered, "Boyd, take the one on the right, McDonald, the left. Now!"

HE SNAPPED up his gun and sent a searing blast of destructive heat through the head of one creature. Every nerve in his body knew a macabre satisfaction as the leprous, putrefying flesh disintegrated into streams of obscene slime.

McDonald and Boyd fired with the same deadly accuracy, and Boyd leaped into the room and dashed toward the remaining creature.

"Get down!" Storm shouted.

Boyd's impetuous charge brought him in the line of fire. McDonald cursed and tried to find an opening to blast at the slowly turning creature. But he was too late.

And so was Boyd. He had waited too long to fire, and a lashing, vengeful beam of light from the creature's disc cut him down in a crumpled heap.

Storm fired twice, deliberately, coldly, and the fourth and last of the galaxy raiders crashed to the

floor in a mass of putrescent ooze.

McDonald hurried to the side of the girl, removed the bonds and helped her to a sitting position. She was conscious, but her face was ashen and drawn and she was trembling violently. McDonald put an arm about her shoulder and held her close.

Storm's face tightened as he saw Larry Masterson getting to his feet. The young captain's face was strained and gray. He looked unseeingly at Storm, then turned to the girl and stumbled to her.

"I know what it was," he said, in a choked voice. "They—did it to me. I know what you stood—for us."

"Captain Masterson," Storm said in a cold precise voice. "You will consider yourself under arrest."

Larry turned to him slowly, a hand moving uncertainly to his face. He sighed and there was a bare trace, a ghost of a weary smile on his lips.

"You were right, of course," he said. "Hanging's too good for me."

Storm turned to McDonald and suddenly the helplessness of their position was plain to him. Out in the void a great fleet of ships from Galaxy X was poised to strike at Earth. And here they were, three men and a girl, a helpless, futile unit.

McDonald's thin, whipcord body looked tired, and a strand of graying hair hung over his forehead. But his hard soldierly face was still firm, knife-sharp.

"Your orders, sir?" he said.

Storm hesitated, then shrugged. He said drily, "There's nothing to say, is there?"

"Perhaps not," McDonald agreed. "But we still have our brains and a source of power that has probably never been equalled in the history of the universe. I mean the robots, of course."

"You're right!" Storm said, and suddenly new excitement, new hope kindled in him. He turned and strode over to the girl. He looked directly into her ice-green eyes. "Will you help us?" he said. "Will you tell us how the robots are controlled?"

"Of course," the girl said. Her eyes were listless, her face dispirited; but slowly as Storm held her gaze, her expression began to change. Her eyes came alive, color touched her cheeks. "I'll do anything to drive creatures like these into the slime where they belong." She shook her head suddenly, and moved her shoulders. "Whatever they did to me doesn't seem to have a permanent effect. I'm all right—but I'll remember. One second under that light gives you a sensation to take to your grave."

She swung her legs off the bed and got to her feet. "Come with me," she said.

SHE LED them out of her quarters and along the edge of the vast robot pit to a stairway cut in the solid, granite-hard walls of the vault. Ascending this stairway for a nearly a quarter of a mile, they entered a great dome-shaped chamber fitted out as a laboratory. In the center of the room a great machine rested, a machine fully fifty yards tall and a hundred yards in diameter at the base, with sides of curving metal that gleamed like silver.

"This was my father's workshop," Karen said.

McDonald stared about, his eyes finally stopping on the machine. From its depths they could hear a gentle murmur. "This is what motivates the robots I suppose," he said, in a musing voice. Data is fed in here and transmitted into electrical impulses that affect radio cells in the robot's heads or bodies. Is that it?"

"Yes," Karen said. "The blueprint of what you want has to be made with care, and takes time. After the blueprint is made it is fed into the machine, which does everything then, even to correcting small errors."

"Where are your father's records?" McDonald said, his voice sharp. "We can't waste a minute."

Karen indicated a long desk at one side of the chamber and soon McDonald was surrounded by charts, graphs and records. He studied them for several minutes, then shrugged helplessly.

Storm said, "Fabulously complicated, eh? It's as I feared."

"I can help," the girl said.

"Thank you," McDonald said. He tapped a pencil thoughtfully on the desk. "It's complicated, of course, but not fabulously so. The principle, the basic idea is simple enough, and is used by every office on Earth today. It's a question of extension. But to extend it as far as this machine indicates your father did is rather staggering. The machine has a million choices at a million separate points in even the simplest diagram. To attempt to make something complicated—that is, to make the robots make something—well, that gets one into mathematics of an extraordinary nature."

"And we need something complicated," Storm said grimly.

"Exactly! Battering rams, projectiles, something of that sort." He rubbed his forehead and then squared his shoulders stubbornly. "We'll give it a try—Karen and I. Won't we Karen?"

"Why, certainly," the girl said, and laughed. "And we'll do it, too."

She looked at Larry as she laughed; but he avoided her eyes. "What's the matter with you?" she said.

"Nothing," he muttered.

She put her hand on his arm. "I'm not angry with you. I think you used your best judgment. Don't brood about it now."

"That's not possible," he said.

Storm cleared his throat. "We, the captain and I, will return to the compound, McDonald. Carry on here, and we'll keep in touch."

"Right, sir."

Storm and Larry left the great vaulted room together, and the girl stood silent by McDonald, staring after them, a curious expression on her face...

STORM watched the visi-screen in his office every hour of the day. Margo and the corporal made his meals, and twice in the next forty-eight hours Karen came down to report on their progress. She said that McDonald was becoming more optimistic.

"Fine," Storm growled, and returned to the visi-screen.

The spreading space fleet of Galaxy X was still in position. He had noticed some motion among ships on the outer edge of the formation, and for several hours he was sure the attack on Earth was commencing.

During that time he paced to and fro before the huge visi-screen, his mood black. Margo brought him coffee and stayed with him. He was learning he could talk to her.

"You see," he said, jerking a thumb at the screen, "they're restless. That could be because the ship they sent here hasn't returned, and they're getting ready to come after it. Or maybe they're getting ready to make for Earth."

"Well, it won't help to prow around like a tiger. Sit down and have some coffee."

"I suppose you're right." He sat on

the edge of his chair and hammered a fist into his palm. "If McDonald can just get a model ready in time! Karen said he seems optimistic."

"She's pretty cheerful herself," Margo said.

Storm shot a look at her. "What do you mean?"

"Naturally you wouldn't notice," Margo said drily. "But she's in love with Larry."

"That's fine!" Storm said. "She can have the satisfaction of loving a traitor who will die on our return to Earth."

"Storm, you can't do it."

"That's all I want to hear about it," Storm said coldly. "You can leave now. I've got work to do."

LATER THAT day Storm snapped on the telescreen they had connected with McDonald. The connection was made at the opposite end and the engineer's lean face appeared. He was smiling.

"Glad you got in touch with us, sir," he said. "We've got the model." He held up a slim metal tube, the size of a cigar, for Storm to see. In the background Karen, too, was smiling.

"It's very much like the V-2's used after World War II, except of course it is made for space, and is about a hundred times as fast. I'm making a blueprint of this now to feed into the machine. Work should get under way here by tonight."

"Great, great," Storm said. He was grinning, he knew; but he couldn't help it. To have a weapon once more, to be able to strike! "I'll be in touch with you again a few hours from now."

"Right, sir."

Storm snapped the switch and McDonald's face disappeared. He walked back and forth for several minutes,

making plans, seeing already in his mind's eye the fight that would develop between their robot-built missiles, and the fleet from Galaxy X. The tactics, strategy, and deployments, of such an attack crowded everything else from his consideration.

For half an hour he was oblivious to everything else. Then, having done as much as he could to explore all contingencies, he put the matter from his mind and turned back to the visiscreen.

He saw instantly that all his plans were pointless—the fleet from Galaxy was moving, slowly but inevitably, away from Jupiter.

They were reassembling, forming in a wedge-shaped cluster that had its spear-end aimed at Earth.

Storm stared at the screen for a full thirty seconds; then wheeled and, with a mighty oath, snapped on the contact with McDonald.

"The attack is starting," he said, harshly, when McDonald appeared. "They're forming to blast-off for Earth. What chance have we got?"

"I need hours yet," McDonald said, his voice strained. "The blast-off pits are being made now, thousands of them. God, it's immense, it's staggering, what we can do—*could* do in just a few more hours."

"How about the projectiles?"

"The blueprint is in the machine. Within a few hours the first will be ready. The directional apparatus—everything will be set."

Storm glanced at the visiscreen. The movement of the great Galaxy X fleet was proceeding at a smoother, faster rate.

"Do what you can, McDonald. We won't quit; but we need a miracle now. They'll be out of range in half an hour."

"There's no chance then," McDon-

ald said, his voice dull and empty.

"Keep at it!" Storm said harshly. "By God, I'll take excuses, but not failure!"

He walked to the visi-screen and stood glaring at the shadowy clusters of ships—ships, he knew to be moving at incredible speed beyond his reach. He felt almost like smashing his fist into the screen to destroy a sight he hated to watch.

A knock on the door sounded, and he said, "Come in."

IT WAS Larry Masterson. The young captain stood at attention, his eyes level.

"Well?" Storm snapped.

Larry glanced at the visi-screen. He said, "They're leaving, aren't they, sir? They're leaving for Earth."

"What of it?" Storm said coldly.

Larry flushed. "I know what you think of me, sir. You have good reason to, of course. But Earth is my home, my country. You can't believe I love it, I know. But I do. I want to help now." He pointed suddenly to the visi-screen. "I want to stop them, sir."

"Yes?" Storm said. "A laudable ambition. How would you go about it?"

"Let me take the *Astro Star* after them," Larry said eagerly. "She's faster and bigger by far than their units. All they have is numbers. I could disrupt their formations, burn hundreds of them from the void before they—well, before it was over. Don't you see, sir, it's our only hope. Earth's only hope. I can delay them an hour, maybe two, and by then McDonald may have the self-propelled missiles ready to shoot after them."

Storm stood stock still a moment, then wheeled and snapped on tele-screen. When McDonald appeared Storm said, "You may get those extra hours you need, after all. Listen:

I'm going after that fleet in the *Astro Star*. You're in command here. If you get your missiles up in time, and all goes well, you can return to Earth in one of the fighters."

"You're committing suicide, sir," McDonald said.

"Possibly. But that's beside the point. You understand your orders? Get that fleet from Galaxy X, then return to Earth in one of the fighters. And, McDonald, for God's sake, make them believe you when you get there. Stay at their throats until they build a Space Arm. That's all."

"Very well, sir," McDonald said.

He suddenly straightened and raised his arm in a crisp salute.

"Goodby, sir."

Storm chuckled as he returned the salute, then snapped off the switch.

When he turned he saw that Margo had entered and was standing by the door. Larry was staring at him with hot flushed eyes.

"You can't leave me out of it," he cried. "It was my idea. You can't deprive me of a chance to clear myself."

"You'll have your chance for that on Earth, after due process of court-martial," Storm said. "I wouldn't trust you to take the *Astro Star*. You'd probably by-pass that fleet out there and scuttle for home."

"Take me with you. I'm a gunnery officer. A good one. I can help."

"No!" Storm cried, and the word fell like a bar of iron in the room. "I go alone."

MMARGO clapped her hands together in applause; but her expression mocked him.

"Now you finally have what you want," she said. "You can die alone for Earth. You can prove conclusively that no one else really cared for Earth, that everyone else was stupid, cowardly and indifferent. They'll

put up statues of you!"

Storm said, "I want none of those things. Why do you deliberately misunderstand me?"

"Because you're such a bitter, twisted, wonderful person," Margo cried out. She ran to him and pounded her fists against his chest. "There was never a man like you, Storm! You're strong and fine and good in some ways, but a brooding freak in others. You see no viewpoint but your own. Here on this compound more than one hundred and fifty men died for Earth; here a man named Thatcher died for Earth; here Boyd and Carney died for Earth, and Karen and Larry suffered for Earth.

"Some of those people thought you a madman; but they gave you the credit for loving Earth, for wanting to do the right thing, even though it was opposed to what they wanted.

"You can't do that. For you, there's only one way! Storm's way. The other ways are wrong, criminal, traitorous. I said once you never loved anyone. I was wrong! You love yourself with an all-consuming passion. There is no room for anyone else."

Storm turned from her and sat down slowly, heavily at his desk. He put a shaking hand to his face.

"You are wrong," he whispered. "I loved someone." He looked up at Margo then, and his eyes devoured the fine lines of her face, the flaring wings of black hair that swept back above her ears, the slim, vital, quick-moving strength of her body.

She met his gaze for a long, tense moment, and then a touch of color came to her cheeks and she turned away, sobbing. "Then take us with you," she said, brokenly. "Let us love something and die for it, too. Don't be selfish, Storm. Give us that much."

For a moment, too, the silence

was thick and oppressive in the small room. Dust motes danced in the still air, and tiny shadowy ships moved on the visi-screen.

Storm put his head down and rubbed his eyes; and then he got slowly to his feet. He spoke and his voice was strong and sure, but there was a softness in it no one had ever heard there before.

"Let's go," he said.

CHAPTER IX

A HEAD OF them the fleet from Galaxy X loomed and spread across the forward visi-screen of the *Astro Star II*.

Storm was at the controls, Margo beside him. Larry was in the waist of the ship, at the batteries of atomic cannons.

"It's incredible," Margo whispered. "There must be hundreds of thousands of them..."

"They've seen us too," Storm said. He pointed. "See that formation at the rear. They're dropping back."

"How long now?"

"Minutes."

Margo's hand tightened on his arm. "I don't care. I know what you feel toward me. I was afraid I'd never know for sure."

Storm touched her hand. "It's not much, really," he said. "I mean, it's so damn little to have, actually. We had nothing. We just knew about it, that's all. You don't mind that too much?"

"No, not too much," Margo said.

Storm smiled at her and said, "That's all the talking we have time for. I'm throwing on the boosters now."

"Okay." She smiled. "Are you a good pilot fighter?"

"Very good," he said. He was glad in a small way that he was, and that

she was going to see him working. "Yes, I'm damn good," he said, and flipped the booster switches and flung the *Astro Star* in a mighty arching dive across the top of the rear echelon of the fleet from Galaxy X.

They flashed through the void, a streaking, silver flash of speed, and from their waist a solid wall of flame suddenly lashed out and struck against the ships of the galaxy.

Storm made two more looping passes that brought Larry's batteries into position, and then they were streaking on toward the main body of the fleet. The rear echelons had joined the black nothingness of the void.

"Larry, much as I hate to give the young pup credit, is damn good," Storm said. "But now the fun is over."

Ahead, the main section of the fleet had changed course swiftly and was deploying its units across the path of the *Astro Star II*.

Storm hurled his ship into combat with a cluster of ships in the dead center of the formation. Lights flashed out from the enemy ships and he felt the *Astro Star* lurch and shudder under their impact. He knew a fin was gone by the sudden slipping list he went into, but he corrected that by stepping up the blast from the rockets on that side.

From the sides of the *Astro Star* the atomic cannons flashed solid walls of light, and the ships from Galaxy X were burned out of existence by the hundreds.

But their numbers were inexhaustible, and they flung themselves at the *Astro Star* in increasingly confident waves, as the mighty ship began to slow down and lose its maneuverability.

Like a crippled shark attacked by thousands of tiny parasites, the *Astro*

Star was gradually weakened, crippled.

Storm swore as it failed to answer his hand. He flung it out in a screaming dive that should have brought him clear of danger, but only made his position worse.

THE FIGHT ranged across thousands of miles of space and in spite of the destruction brought by the powerful cannons of the *Astro Star*, the inevitable end came closer with each blazing, flame-filled moment.

Soon the *Astro Star* would lose its speed, its ability to maneuver; and then the attacking ships could draw back and blast away until its mighty hull weakened, its sections collapsed, and it died in the void.

Storm caught Margo's hand.

The ship was sluggish now, almost as if it were bound by thick heavy atmosphere. It was becoming nothing more than a huge target.

Margo's fingers tightened convulsively on his hand.

"Look, Storm!" she cried.

Storm swung his eyes to the visiscreen, and a grin split his weary face, light danced in his eyes.

"Thank God!" he shouted.

Streaming across the screen toward the Galaxy fleet were eight flashing columns of projectiles, slim, deadly, inevitable.

Tiny flames glowed from exhaust blasts at their rear as they arced through the void to close with their targets—to close inevitably, implacably, irresistibly.

Storm gave the *Astro Star* every last ounce of power, throwing on all the rockets and the auxiliary, and like a spirited horse answering the demand of its master, the ship lurched ahead and cleared the galaxy fleet in a mighty soaring arc.

They were not a second too soon, for the area they left was transformed in a matter of seconds to a scene of violent destruction.

The slim missiles flashed into the heart of the Galaxy fleet. Hundreds of them were burned down, but thousands more poured into the catyclusmic fight. Storm, watching, saw thousands more breaking away from the pull of Jupiter and flashing up to fulfil their mission.

Storm cut his auxiliary power and headed for their base....

Margo was laughing and crying and Storm knew how she felt as he put his arms about her and held her close.

CHAPTER X

STORM stood up as the door of his office opened and Larry came in. It was four hours later, and they knew by then that the threat to Earth was gone. The fleet from Galaxy was debris.

"There's nothing much to say," Storm said. "Maybe we've both learned something out here, Captain. I know I have."

"Didn't you forget something when you called me 'Captain'?" Larry said.

"No, it wasn't a slip of the tongue, if that's what you mean," Storm said, a trace of a smile on his lips. "You're a captain of the Earth Federation, and a damn good one."

Larry grinned and put out his hand. "All I want, now or ever, is to stay in your command, sir."

"I appreciate the sentiment," Storm said drily, "although I realize you don't mean it." He glanced through the window, saw Karen passing, and released Larry's hand. "There, for instance," he said, "is something you want, too."

Larry smiled, saluted, and left.

Storm stood in the doorway of his office, smoking a cigar, and studying the atmosphere of the planet. It was clear and clean. Soon they would leave here, cleaving through that atmosphere to the silent void that lay between the planets of his universe. A void that was now free.

He saw Margo come from her hut at the end of the compound. She saw him and waved.

Smiling, he waited for her.

TOMORROW'S WORKSHOP

By

CLIFFORD GATES

FOR A REASONABLE amount of money, anybody, right now, can build and equip a workshop at home, capable of making many things in wood or metal. Hand tools are very cheap, motor powered tools are fairly cheap—and are getting cheaper. This well-nigh perfect system is getting better all the time.

No matter what activity a man engages in, he can't forget the thrill of creating something in metal or wood or stone. All the paper work in the world just doesn't give quite the same feeling. And because all sorts of tools are being brought within reach of the average person, he'll be able to indulge himself completely in this sort of pleasure.

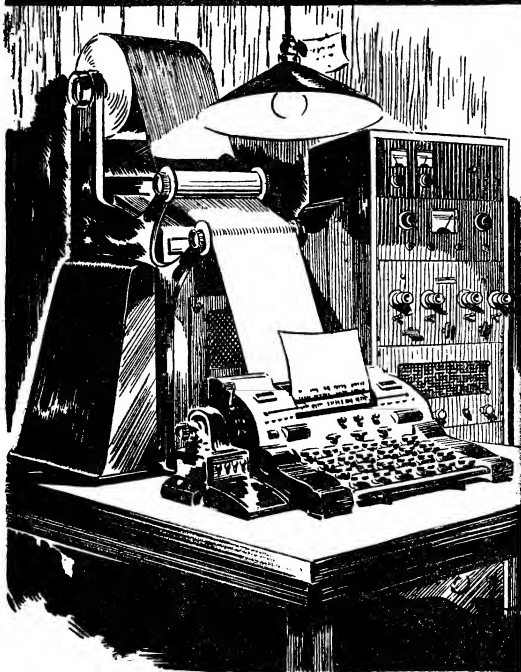
By 1975 it is predicted that men will work no more than twenty or thirty hours a week. This vast amount of leisure time that is left, will find a tremendous outlet in creative activity. And the minute a man gets his hands on tools, he wants better ones, which means of course, machines.

We predict that by the year two thousand it will be hard to tell a home workshop from a commercial factory, so numerous and so varied will be the equipment found therein.

"Yes," says John Smith, "I want that automatic lathe, and the complete foundry sent out to the house. I'm building a jet plane, and it's tricky!"

Maybe fantasy—maybe not. We'll bet on the second....

Typewriter from



the Future

by Peter Worth

Peter Abbott's stories were hailed as classics years ahead of their time. And of course, they were—by a few centuries . . .

PHIL BACON scanned the almost illegible scrawl of the letter with swift thrusts of his eyes. He grunted. Then he tossed it

onto the growing pile of those already opened.

"Two thousand already this week," he groaned, but there was an undertone of satisfaction to the sound. His eyes dwelt broodingly on the pile of as-yet-unopened letters. Suddenly he relaxed with a chuckle. "Why

As he picked up the odd-appearing microphone, the keys of the huge machine began to click swiftly . .



read them?" he asked his assistant, Ralph Hargrave. "They all say the same thing!"

The phone, half buried under the letter heap, shrilled harshly. Automatically Phil's hand scooped it up.

"Phil Bacon speaking," he said. "Yes...yes...yes.... Thank you, Mr. Arnold. Thank you very much."

He dropped the phone back in its cradle with his lips puckered in a silent whistle of amazed delight. He had just received a hundred dollar a month raise!

With a faraway look in his eyes he picked up one of the typed written letters he had set aside for inclusion in the readers' column of the magazine and read it over again. It was indicative of many others. It was addressed simply to the editor of Absurd Stories Magazine. It read:

Dear sir:

Let me congratulate you on another story by the greatest author to ever write for your magazine—or any other magazine for that matter. Peter Abbott's latest story in the November issue, "Life Begins at Birth," was the most vivid, gripping, enthralling, realistic, prophetic, well thought out, consistent, masterful piece of futuristic LITERATURE I have ever read.

I am an educator, sir, in charge of the public school system of Kansas City. I have spent a lifetime of study in education. I am in charge of three thousand teachers. I have almost dictatorial powers over the education of nearly a hundred thousand grade and high school pupils in Kansas City. Yet, the educational methods and technique so casually woven into Mr. Peter Abbott's story, "Life Begins at Birth," are so obviously superior to those now in vogue, that I intend to order all three thousand of

the teachers to study that story and make immediate plans for a revision of our educational setup.

Let me congratulate you again, Mr. Editor, for that story, and for the best goshdarned magazine being published ANYWHERE today.

Respectfully yours,
Clyde B. Brightchild

Phil Bacon laid the letter gently in the wire basket reserved for Readers Column material and picked up another letter. At its top was the letter head of a billion dollar corporation. It was addressed to Mr. Phil Bacon, Editor Absurd Stories. It read:

Dear sir:

I am in charge of Research. Under me are five hundred of the world's top flight scientists. Each year we spend two to three million dollars on research. During the past two years over half of my staff has been working full time on a top secret device for the United Nations Armed Branch.

One month ago one of my employees brought me a magazine I had never heard of, Absurd Stories. It was opened in the middle of a story by Peter Abbot, entitled, "More Than One Way to Skin a—."

In five masterful paragraphs Mr. Abbott sketched the COMPLETE SOLUTION to the major problem involved in this research. Our robot brain, of which you have undoubtedly heard, has been working steadily on this problem for six months—and it performs five thousand man hours of calculations every ten minutes!

Mr. Abbott, no doubt, dreamed up the solution with the aid of the marvelous scientific intuition which he so obviously demonstrated in the rest of that superb story. It was pure

coincidence that he happened to hit the right answer, since no man in a single lifetime could have worked it out. But we, and the entire world, owe him a deep debt of gratitude for having presented the solution and made it possible for us to free the robot calculator for other work.

May I congratulate you again, sir, for having such an outstanding author as Peter Abbott. I will surely make it a point to read all of his stories as they come out.

Yours truly,

J. J. Jayhawks, Ph.D.

AND THERE were thousands of others. A letter from the headquarters of the Republican Party stating that they were constructing their 1956 Presidential platform on the political theories "so casually woven into the background" of Peter Abbott's masterful story, "If At First—." A letter from the National Biologic Research Bureau stating that they were converting their entire setup to conform with the theories of genetics "so casually inserted as the background theme" in Peter Abbott's wonderful story, "Organism, 2354 A. D.." A letter from the Morehouse Kennels stating that they had succeeded in crossing a dog with a cat and creating a new house pet that showed promise of developing a million dollar business, by following the directions "given so clearly and so casually" in Peter Abbott's excellent story, "The Battle of the Cogs and Dats."

More gratifying was the circulation department's figures showing that Absurd Stories had risen from a monthly publication of a mere three thousand copies to well over the half million mark.

Slightly annoying, Phil Bacon thought, frowning at the stack of

photo offset amateur publications in the wastebasket, was the growing feeling of animosity in Impossible Fiction Fandom for Absurd Stories' publishing of stories so realistic they couldn't be proven to be impossible.

It reminded him of the history of Science Fiction Fandom in the 1955 edition of The Encyclopedia Britannica. In fact, the snarling fan editors brought it up themselves, and pointed out that the very reason Science Fiction was outlawed by international agreement in 1950 was because its authors were giving away top defense secrets, and that if Absurd Stories didn't watch out Impossible Fiction Fandom would be forced to stop reading it out of self protection.

"Oh well," Phil Bacon said, shrugging off this minor annoyance. "That would drop circulation by only ten or fifteen thousand anyway."

And after all, the legal staff of Arnold Publications had their proof readers that read every word before it was sent to the typesetters. It was their job to make sure none of Peter Abbott's stuff violated international law in any way—and they had O.K.'d it all. All, that is, except the one remaining Peter Abbott story still left in the backlog.

"THAT REMINDS me—" Phil muttered to himself. "I'd better jack up Pete a little. He's late with his story this month."

He punched a small button at one corner of his desk. A moment later the ornate office door opened and a young lady entered, a shorthand book and pencil in her perfectly manicured hand.

Phil Bacon leered at her; it was his way of paying her a compliment on her appearance.

"Would you rather work—or—?"

Phil asked, his leer widening.

Mary Worth yawned with exaggerated boredom in Phil's face. It was a technique that had been handed on to her by the former secretary before she quit, ten days before.

"Take a telegram," Phil said, watching Mary as she edged around to the other side of the desk and sat down.

When she was ready he dictated: "To Peter Abbott, Box one eighty-five, Route one, Pulaski Junction, Washington. Mr. Abbott colon. Are you or are you not sending another story at once question mark. If story gets here inside of two weeks we will give you a bonus of a—a sixteenth of a cent a word."

"A sixteenth of a cent?" Mary Worth said, looking up. "How can the company stand it? Why, that will be five sixteenths of a cent a word! A full sixteenth of what he could get from any other Impossible Story editor—if he had brains enough to shop around."

"None of your sarcasm, sweetheart," Phil said, grinning. "Everything is relative. He's happy. We're happy. And nobody but us knows where he lives. But between you and me, I sometimes wonder about it myself. Peter Abbott is probably the smartest man alive—in most things. Why hasn't he ever had horse sense enough to pick up a writers' journal and find out what standard rates are?"

Phil's attention vacillated between Mary's knees and the mystery of Peter Abbott. The mystery won out for the moment.

"If I don't get a reply to that telegram by tomorrow," he said. "I'll have enough of a case to convince the boss I should take a trip to Washington and find out what's holding Pete up. For quite a while there he sent in stories so fast he was ac-

tually making a couple of hundred a month. Then all of a sudden two months ago they stopped coming. Why?"

"Maybe he picked up a writers' journal," Mary suggested sweetly. "If he did he found out that *Enthralling Impossible Stories* is paying two and a half cents a word—and when the boss finds it out you will be retired to the basement as a proof reader."

Phil shuddered at the prospect. He had thought of that danger himself more than once, and wondered what to do about it.

"You know, Mary," he said—serious with her for once. "I've wondered what to do about Pete myself. When I paid him a quarter of a cent for his first story I expected him to send the check back and name the price he expected. Instead, I got a letter from him with almost real tears of gratitude. So I figured maybe he was completely new at the writing game—in spite of the superb style of his writing. Then, as the stories piled up, even though I wanted to ensure him continuing to write for us by paying him top rates—" He spread his hands in a gesture of wonder. "How could I boost his word rate to four or five cents without him wondering if he had been robbed on the quarter of a cent. But if he was a country genius, the money he did get would be enough so he would want to go to the city sooner or later. In the city he would probably run across a writers' journal and learn the truth. I hoped if he did he would jump me rather than changing markets without even a 'So long, you.'"

Mary appeared pleased and rather flattered at this new side of her boss. She suggested, "Why don't you offer him four cents a word in this telegram? It seems obvious he's

changed markets. That will bring him back."

"No," Phil said, shaking his head. "I'd never know then if I could have continued buying from him for less than a cent. The telegram the way it stands should get some sort of response. If it doesn't, I'll drop in on him and find out what's what before offering him what he's worth. Get that off right away. Put on it for him to wire a reply collect."

IT WAS almost twenty-four hours before a reply came. It arrived after a morning of rushing and last minute shifting around of office workers so that Phil could catch the afternoon plane to the coast. It came just a few minutes after the last detail for an indefinite leave had been fixed up. It caught Phil sitting at his desk counting the five hundred dollars expense money, a dreamy, satisfied light in his eyes, the round trip plane tickets on the desk at his elbow.

Mary Worth brought it in and dropped it on top of the pile of money, then watched Phil's expression as his face lit up with the realization that it must be from Peter Abbott, and alter subtly, reflecting his thoughts, as he glanced regretfully at the money and at the tickets.

She watched his face as he opened the telegram and read it. His expression changed from quiet concentration to incredulity, through disgust, to anger. She took the yellow paper from his lax fingers and read the message.

The message itself was very short.

"My typewriter's out of order!" Phil shouted. "That's what Abbott tells me. 'My typewriter's out of order.' For two months or more he doesn't write a story because his typewriter's out of order. The money he could have earned would have

bought a half dozen typewriters!"

"Not the money you pay him, Santa Claus," Mary soothed. "Anyway, I doubt if they have a typewriter repair shop in Pulaski Junction. It doesn't sound like the name of a place that could support a typewriter repair shop."

"I'll send him a new typewriter," Phil said. "I'll wire it to him, compliments of the company." He looked regretfully at the plane tickets. "No," he added. "I'll take it to him myself. I'll—I'll—I'll buy it out of my expense money. That's what I'll do."

"Maybe it's a stall," Mary suggested. "Maybe he's selling to one of the other magazines and didn't have the nerve to tell you."

"That's why I'm going anyway," Phil said firmly. "The only way to get at the bottom of this is to go there. I'm going to buy him the finest electric typewriter money can buy, and charge it to the company."

"Better find out if Pulaski Junction has electricity first Phil," Mary suggested dryly.

"Why don't you come with me—dear," Phil leered. "Then you can find out those things for me."

Mary started to yawn elaborately. Something in Phil's eyes stopped her. The yawn changed to a smile. The leer on Phil's face changed slowly. It was replaced by a slow flush. There was an intense silence.

"How about a show when I get back, Mary?" Phil broke the silence, gruffly.

"O.K.," she answered.

"Well," Phil said, his voice changing to all business. "I'd better get out and buy that typewriter. The plane leaves this afternoon."

He left the office with his eyes averted.

THE WEATHERBEATEN road-sign was not even a standard

highway marker. The rented car Phil had picked up in Spokane protested shimmyingly and with vociferous rattling as he forced it into the weed flanked, lane-and-a-half wide dirt road.

There was a feeling of accomplishment in his heart. Pulaski Junction had not been listed on any map. No service station attendant had ever heard of it. The main telegraph office confessed they had no office there; but simply phoned telegrams to the grocery store at Pulaski Junction and let the telephone operator locate it.

A half hour at a telephone had brought out the fact that Pulaski Junction was seventy-six miles from Spokane. That information had come from the main office of the telephone company. They got that information from a book that listed mileage only.

The State Highway Department had been quite certain there was no Pulaski Junction. None of the three major railroads had any idea where it could be.

All that had exhausted another full hour. There had seemed nothing left to do except advertise in the papers for anyone who knew where Pulaski Junction was to come forward and confess—then Phil had remembered something someone had told him once.

On the strength of the information he had gone to the local stock exchange and quietly passed around the hint that he was interested in buying some shares in a mine near Pulaski Junction. After making sure the rumor was well planted, he had retreated to The Green Lantern a block away for a long delayed lunch.

He had just finished his dessert when the fellow sat down casually beside him at the counter and ordered a cup of coffee. After the waitress brought it he glanced casually at

Phil and murmured, "I hear you're interested in the mine just out of Pulaski Junction."

Two cigars, five beers, and an hour later he had found himself in a dusty office poring over a dirty map of ancient vintage and concealing his triumph, at having at last found the location of that hamlet, behind a face filled with naive gullibility and eagerness to become the angel of an oreless hole in the side of a hill.

The memory of that caused him to chuckle as the rented car bounced along the road. The seat beside him held a pile of maps and papers that had been forced on him by the promoter.

An ugly, logged-over hill came down to the road after a mile. The road followed the base of the hill, finally leaving it to wander toward a distant range of mountains. Without warning it dipped into a wooded gulch. After hugging the base of a twenty-five foot cliff of black lava rock for another half mile it turned north past a clump of sagging farm buildings and a solitary, lonesome cow, bringing up between a country grocery store and a blacksmith shop.

Two old men were sitting on a bench on the porch of the grocery store. The metallic ringing of a hammer striking an anvil came from the blacksmith's. To Phil it all seemed unrealistic. As he stepped out of the car he was conscious of the quiet domination of the scene that the tall, motionless pines exerted.

His shoes made sharp hollow sounds on the porch. The two old men were eyeing him curiously. He nodded a greeting and hesitated, then decided he was more apt to get the information he wanted from the storekeeper. Pushing open the swinging screendoor he entered the store.

There were three women. The grocer, a pink-faced middle-aged

man, was busy running from one shelf to another gathering the cans and packages one of the women was calling off from a list scawled on a torn fragment of an envelope she held in her hand.

Phil lit a cigaret and surveyed the place leisurely, waiting until it would be his turn. He listened to the women, and to the quiet friendly voice of the grocer.

The woman he was waiting on finally had all her groceries. She murmured something about getting some money soon to pay her bill with. As she picked up her sack of groceries and turned to leave she said something that caused Phil Bacon to stiffen in surprise.

"Thank you, Mr. Abbott," she said.

PHIL STUDIED the grocer. He was about five feet ten, with unruly light hair. He seemed somewhere in his late forties. His forehead was high, with two fine creases between his eyes that spoke of the quiet intelligence coupled with an untroubled mind. His voice was cheerful as he carried on light conversation with the customers.

It was understandable now why Peter Abbott had been so unhurried about getting his typewriter fixed. As a grocer he had probably been staying up half the night writing his stories.

It was remarkable that he had written what he had. For several months he had truned out over a hundred thousnd words a month—and that was twice as much as the average full time writer could do!

Phil smiled to himself. Peter Abbott would be thrilled and surprised when he saw the new typewriter out in the car.

In the back of his mind, though, Phil was growing a conscience. Here was a grocer who cheerfully let peo-

ple run up bills without paying them. No doubt he was pinched for money to get new supplies. He had been forced to turn to story writing to get money. And he, Phil, had paid him only a tenth or less of what they were worth.

Silently he resolved to correct that—to some extent. From now on Pete Abbott would get at least a cent for his work. Yes, sir. This resolve made Phil feel better.

At last the third woman picked up her bag and departed through the swinging screendoor. Phil was alone in the store with the pink faced Mr. Abbott.

The grocer gave him a friendly smile.

"Yes?" he asked.

"You're Mr. Abbott?" Phil asked.

"That's right," the grocer replied, frowning slightly.

"I have something out in my car for you," Phil said. "Will you help me carry it in?"

A few moments later they had the heavy box resting on a clear space on a counter. Phil took out his pocket knife and slit the paper tape that sealed it. He opened the top of the box and pulled out brown paper, revealing the virgin beauty of an electric typewriter.

"There you are," he said proudly, watching the reactions on the grocer's face.

"Mine?" the grocer asked doubtfully. "But I don't understand. If this is some sort of sales promotion—"

"You're Peter Abbott, aren't you?" Phil asked.

A light of comprehension lit up the grocer's face.

"So that's it!" he said, laughing. "No. I'm George Abbott. Peter is my brother."

He walked over to a safe in a corner behind the counter and twirled the dial. Pulling open the safe door

he brought out a white envelope and tossed it on the counter in front of Phil.

"There's your money," he said cheerfully. "I'd been hoping when you discovered your mistake you would write me. Then I would have returned all that money without your having to make this long trip."

"What are you talking about?" Phil demanded.

"You're the publisher that sent those checks to Pete, aren't you?" George Abbott asked.

"Yes, but—" Phil began.

"Well, then," George Abbott said. "I guess maybe I'd better explain. You see, Pete isn't quite right in his head. When the checks started coming I knew something must be wrong someplace. I didn't say anything though. Pete is—ah—rather strong. I humor him rather than sending him back to the state hospital. So, knowing that sooner or later you would discover something wrong and write for the money, I talked Pete into letting me keep it for him. He doesn't know what money is, anyway."

"Doesn't know what money is?" Phil asked weakly.

"No," George Abbott said, smiling cheerfully. "He was born that way. Never learned to read nor write. Harmless as long as he isn't upset."

"No!" Phil breathed. "Now I KNOW you're kidding me."

"Oh no I'm not," George Abbott insisted quietly. "If you care to see him you can. But I'd suggest that you just take your money and leave. I'd hate to be responsible."

"My money?" Phil echoed faintly.

"Yes," the grocer answered. "Every cent of it's there. I would have returned the checks but—well, as I told you, Pete insisted the money was his. To humor him I cashed them and saved the money where he could see it. But I knew that sooner or later

the mistake would be discovered and you would want it back."

"But the telegram—" Phil began, confused.

"What telegram?" George Abbott asked, surprised.

PHIL fumbled in his pockets and brought it out. The grocer read it.

"Now that's a shame," he said. "You came all the way out here because of that telegram. Well," he sighed resignedly, "I'll pay for your trip out here, too. How much does that amount to, on top of the checks?"

Phil looked dazedly around. Spying an old chair he went over to it and sank unsteadily into it. The grocer's pink face was apologetic and sympathetic.

"I—I hope that will satisfy you," he pleaded. "I don't have much money. All I can do to keep the store going. This will upset Pete. I had hoped I could keep him here. He likes it here better than in the state hospital."

"But the typewriter," Phil sputtered. "He DOES have a typewriter, doesn't he?"

"No," George said firmly. "And even if he did, he doesn't know how to read nor write. What use would a typewriter be to him?"

"I don't know," Phil said. "In fact, right now I don't know anything."

He eyed the money on the counter hungrily, tempted to take it and get out.

Then, he thought of his hundred dollar a month raise, and the increased circulation that had caused it, and Peter Abbott's stories that were the cause of both.

"Look," he said, coming to a sudden decision. "I'm going to tell you the truth. We sent those checks in payment for some very good stories written by someone calling himself

Peter Abbott, with Pulaski Junction as his mailing address. Those stories were written with an electric typewriter. They stopped coming. We sent a telegram here. This telegram saying 'My typewriter is broken,' came from here. **SOMEBODY WROTE THOSE STORIES!**"

The grocer looked at Phil Bacon queerly.

"If you say someone did, someone did," he conceded. "But it couldn't have been Pete." He sighed. "I suppose you won't be convinced until you see him. I'm telling you, though, it will only make trouble."

A faraway look came into the grocer's eyes. He chuckled sadly.

"Too bad, too," he said. "If Pete had good sense he might have made a good writer. Has a terrific imagination. Just a few months ago he was telling me a whopper about taking a walk through a hole between two trees. Absurd, of course; but the way he told it, it sounded almost real. He even offered to take me with him. But of course it was a hole in the side of the cliff—lots of them around. I couldn't take the time away from the store."

"What," Phil asked crisply, "did Pete see when he went through the hole between two trees?"

"Oh," George Abbott laughed good naturedly. "He said he found himself in a pawnshop—he must have learned what a pawnshop was down at the hospital. He said he bought a wonderful machine for three dollars. Even wanted me to go down to the cabin he lives in and look at it—but of course—"

"You couldn't take the time away from the store," Phil murmured.

"That's right," George Abbott agreed complacently.

Phil studied the toe of his shoe for a silent moment. The screen door squeaked open. It was a little boy.

"Mama wants some stamps, Mr. Abbott," he said, handing the grocer a slip of paper and some coins. The grocer pulled open a drawer and brought out a thick pile of stamps. Phil watched him tear off some stamps and shove the rest carelessly back into the drawer. The money went into the cash register. The little boy left.

"Do you have to watch Pete any?" Phil asked.

"Oh, I suppose I should," George replied. "But he never runs away. Sometimes he stays at his cabin, and sometimes he stays here with me. When I have to make a trip to Spokane he stays in the store and acts as a sort of watchdog. Of course I don't let him sell anything."

"This telegram," Phil said. "It was sent day before yesterday. Was Pete by any chance alone here then?"

"Yes!" George exclaimed. "That accounts for it. I had to go to Spokane in the afternoon."

"Then he could have answered the phone," Phil said triumphantly. "He could have gotten the message and given the reply. Not only that, that machine he bought could have been an electric typewriter and he could have—" His voice dwindled impotently.

The grocer chuckled amusedly. Then he took pity on Phil.

"Tell you what I'll do," he offered. "I'll lock up pretty soon and take a walk with you down to Pete's cabin and you can talk with him. That ought to satisfy you—and I doubt if anything else will."

THE TRAIL was merely a worn groove in the smooth carpet of pine needles that blanketed the ground under the tall evergreens. After half a mile the two men reached a small stream which they crossed by running and leaping.

Phil Bacon had envisioned the cabin as made of logs. It was more on the order of what he would have considered a shack, constructed of boards nailed onto a frame vertically, with narrow pieces covering the cracks.

A twinge of homesickness for the good old days when he himself was a writer shot through Phil Bacon's mind. He had spent almost a year in a cabin very similar to this one—and turned out the best work of his career. That was back in the days of science fiction—when the ideal was to write a story so consistent and plausible that no one could prove it was impossible.

The cabin was deserted. George Abbott called when they were in sight of it through the trees. There was no answer. When they looked in the window there was no one there.

But there was something else that made Phil's heart start thumping wildly against his ribs. It was a plasticased science fiction dream. After the first moment of surprised paralysis Phil left the window and pushed open the door.

A strange prickling feeling tugged at the hair on the nape of his neck as he came to a stop in front of the machine. He had seen literally thousands of factory made products. The lines where steel molds had come together in the forming of plastic objects, the little piece-numbers, the signs of a stamping machine having made the parts—all added up to the undeniable fact that the thing was an assembly line product. A million dollars worth of tooled machines had built the thing. And yet, beyond question, there was not another machine like it in all the world!

There was a standard typewriter keyboard at the front, outside the main case, but covered with a re-

moveable plastic case of its own. The keyboard was too far from the platen to run the type mechanically.

Below the section where the platen was were several metal cased objects from which ran transparent tubes filled with many fine wires of every color.

Above the platen were things that sent a rush of speculative thoughts pulsing into Phil's already overloaded mind. The paper on the platen was from a large roll attached to the back of the plasticase. From the platen it went up to what could only be an automatic mechanism for cutting sheets of standard size and piling them neatly.

Hanging from a hook attached to the side of the plasticase was a small object that appeared to be a microphone, with a cord that went into one of the metal cased things inside.

Phil turned to George Abbott, who had silently entered to stand beside him and inspect the thing.

"Impossible though it seems," Phil said slowly, "this can be only one conceivable thing—a robot typewriter. How much of a robot remains to be seen; but from what you have told me about Pete, and from the quality of the stories Pete has sent me, it must be that this machine is not only a robot typewriter, but is also able to write—create—an original story equal to or superior to anything a living man can write."

He reached out and touched the plasticase reverently.

"Somewhere inside this thing," he said, "is a robot brain that can actually think!"

"What makes you think so?" George Abbott asked skeptically.

"There HAS to be," Phil said emphatically. "Figure it out. Pete can't read or write. He couldn't possibly dictate the type of story he has been sending to me. Only a lifetime of

immersion in literature could develop the powers of expression in those stories. There wasn't any trace of the thinking of someone 'not right in his head' in any part of those stories."

"But you're forgetting something," George said. "How would he know where to send them? Oh, I grant you that if this typewriter or whatever it is wrote stories Pete could have helped himself to the stamps and given the package to the mailman. But how would he find out where to mail them?"

"I think I know the answer to that," Phil said. "Peter knows what year it is doesn't he?"

"I doubt it," George answered. "He knows what year he was born, though. And he knows how old he is. But he wouldn't be able to figure out what year it was from that. Why?"

"Because," Phil said, emphasizing each word, "the robot brain inside this thing could know the proper address itself, as a matter of ancient history, and it could figure out the year from what Peter knows of his age and when he was born!"

"Think so?" George asked, looking at Phil queerly.

"Don't you see?" Phil said eagerly. "This part of Peter's story is true. It follows that the rest is true. He actually did go through a 'hole' between two pine trees. He actually did buy this thing for three dollars from what he thought was a pawn broker. But the hole between the trees was a time warp—something considered impossible. HE WENT INTO THE FUTURE."

Phil walked around the table on which the machine rested. In the back was the large roll of paper, standard width. There was also a flat place at the top where the typed sheets came out. There were other

things, too. In back he could see another platen that hadn't been visible from the front. Just outside the case in back of this second platen was an empty shelf.

Phil walked back to the front. Minute after minute he was seeing more of the details of the complex machine. He noticed now what seemed to be a loud speaker down in one corner.

Underneath the keyboard, he noticed, was a long slit that might be for inserting a sheet of paper.

"There's no cord from this machine to the light socket!" he exclaimed suddenly.

George Abbott walked around the machine.

"Nope," he said, concluding his investigation.

"That means that there must be some sort of atomic power unit inside that runs it," Phil mused. "I wonder what's wrong with it."

A new voice erupted in the silence of the cabin. It was a cultured, precise voice.

"Unit A457322 must be replaced," it said.

"Huh?" Phil said, startled. "Ohhh." He turned to George. "See what I told you?" he said triumphantly.

George Abbott was standing by the machine, a look of surprise on his face, the microphone from the machine dangling in his hand.

Phil took the microphone from him, guessing that taking it from its hook had made the connection so that the robot brain could hear what was said. He lifted it to his lips and opened his mouth. The sound of heavy footsteps came from the porch.

"Put it back," George whispered urgently. "He might get mad if he finds you were monkeying with his toy."

Phil put the microphone back on

its hook as the door opened.

Peter Abbott was a big man. As he paused, a bewildered expression on his face, Phil understood why George Abbott was so anxious not to anger his brother. His shoulders filled the width of the doorway. His head would have scraped the top of it if he had stood erect; but he had never acquired the habit of standing erect with squared shoulders and chest out.

"Pete," George said quickly, soothingly, with an undertone of anxiety. "This is Phil Bacon, the man that sends you all that money. He's come to see you."

Peter Abbott turned his soft eyes on Phil. He stared at him vacuously for a breathless minute, then broke into a slow smile.

"George didn't believe me," he said. His voice was deep and pleasant. Phil was beginning to find it hard to believe that it belonged to a mind that 'wasn't quite right.'

"I guess you can't blame him, Pete," Phil said. "It was a little hard for even me to believe. But I know it's all true now—and so does George. Don't you George?"

George nodded without speaking.

Peter Abbott stood silently in the doorway. Phil was to learn that that was the major characteristic of Peter—that he would stand motionless for an indefinite length of time, unconcerned about silences in conversation or the events about him.

"This hole you went through," Phil said. "I'd like to see that. I'll bet it will be interesting. Would you take us to it?"

"Sure," Peter Abbott said calmly. Without another word he turned and began walking. Phil, with a hasty glance at George, hurried to catch up with him.

Peter Abbott walked along with the smooth gait of men accustomed

to walking long distances. He ignored Phil and George.

THE PATH he took led farther away from the direction of the store and blacksmith shop that comprised the business center of Pulaski Junction. Shortly there was no sign of a path at all. Peter's steps were sure, though. This was familiar ground to him. As they walked along Phil could picture this almost friendless man wandering, day after day, alone with his simple thoughts, in this cathedral of Nature, where the dome of the church was the sky itself, and the stately columns that towered heavenward were trees—some of them hundreds of years old.

They came to the creek. Peter jumped across without a break in his stride. Phil and George had to make a running leap. For a breathtaking instant Phil was off balance on the other bank, almost falling backward into the water. He made it safely, however, and in a moment was again beside the silent Peter Abbott, walking toward—what?

That question filled his mind to the exclusion of all else. For almost countless years he had edited and published stories dealing with mysterious "holes" through which heroes and villains passed to and from adventure, in time, space, and in alien dimensions. Now he was taking a walk to see one—as he might walk a mile or two to see a geyser at Yellowstone Park or an elephant in a zoo.

What would it look like? Would it be a "queerly distorting space that tore painfully at the eyes"? Would it be a "black hole whose infinite depths held curiously twisting spirals of obsidian gloom in which strange shapes moved just beyond the range of the mind to grasp?"

Would it perhaps "hover motion-

less a few feet above the earth, vibrating with a power that seemed neither physical nor mental—and yet in some strange way BOTH?"

He kept looking ahead—trying to see it before they reached it. More than once he was sure he had discovered it. A shaft of sunlight through the trees, a vague shadow in the underbrush,—even a clear space framed by bushes, each became suspect. And still Peter Abbott walked on, his tireless stride eating up the distance that brought them closer and closer to something that had long been considered the legitimate province of Impossible Stories literature because science had proven it to be impossible.

Once the fleeting thought came to Phil that no matter what he found he would never be able to tell about it. He smiled sadly to himself.

IT WAS THE hollow sound his feet made on the wooden floor that jerked him out of his reverie. He blinked his eyes. Around him were the four walls of a room devoid of furniture of any kind.

Overhead, nestled against the high, plastered ceiling, was an ordinary fluorescent tube. It lit the windowless room.

Phil turned around. At his back was a rectangular frame the size of a doorway; but through it he could see the unbroken continuity of the wall of the bare room.

There was another door—closed. It was in the wall, and obviously led out of the room into another. Phil looked at it, then turned his eyes back to the rectangular frame. Obviously that was where he had "entered" the room.

George, he could see, was as amazed as himself. Only Peter showed no surprise.

Tentatively Phil stepped toward

the opening. He hesitated, then stepped through. Immediately he was back in the forest, the trees around him. He made a careful about-face. Before him he could detect no sign of any "hole" or distortion of space. There was only the solitude of the unbroken forest—except at his feet.

He looked down and saw he was standing on a faint trail that ended abruptly two feet ahead of his toes. It ended even with the two thick-trunked pines. That much was the way George had said it would be. It was a "hole" between two trees, all right; but nothing visible.

Compressing his lips Phil stepped forward again. Once more he was in the bare room with Peter and George. There had been no slightest sensation of "force" or "twist" or other phenomenon classically associated with the fictional concept of "holes in space or time."

With his reappearance in the room Peter went to the door and knocked. He did it as if he were doing something he had done before. Then he stepped back.

A moment later there was a scraping of a key in the lock. The knob twisted. The door opened a crack, slowly. A face appeared. An eye surveyed them impersonally. The door closed again with a mild bang. There was the rattling of a chain. Then the door opened normally and a figure stepped into the room, closing the door behind it.

The figure was that of a man. That much seemed certain. Phil's shocked eyes registered the fact. They tried to balk at registering the man's clothing.

The trousers—the top of the trousers, were held heart high. At the bottom the cuffs were tight fitting around the ankles, with glistening gray buttons forming a neat line half

way up to the knees.

The single breasted coat had enormously wide padded shoulders and swept in a gentle curve down to the knees in a swallowtail effect, buttoning—not together in front—but to the trousers, so that the coat lacked about four inches of coming together in front. The lapels were large and pointed upward.

Phil could see the resemblance to a zoot suit—but he could also see by the manner of the man that it must be a conventional business suit.

All of this took a shocked second to penetrate. Then the man was smiling and bowing an effusive welcome.

"Ah, Mister Abbott," he said. "I see you are back again to get the part to the typewriter I sold you. And you are just in time. It got it from the repair store only a few minutes ago."

A greedy look came into the man's eyes.

"Do you have that nineteen-fourteen quarter?" he asked.

PETER REACHED into his pocket and brought out a quarter. He handed it to the zoot-suited man who took it eagerly and examined it with an obviously tender touch.

"So that's why you were so curious about the dates on quarters the other day!" George said to Peter.

"Uh huh," Peter Abbott grunted absent-mindedly.

Phil, watching all this, concluded silently that Peter had long ago learned not to let his brother's attitude affect him.

"Very good," the man said, slipping the quarter into a pocket. "I'll bring you the part. The instructions on how to install it come with it." He turned to Phil Bacon. "I see you have brought friends with you," he said, his voice purring. "Any friends of Peter Abbott are friends of mine.

Your names?" He held out his hand.

"Philip Bacon," Phil said, smiling as he took the proffered hand. "And yours?"

"Simal Wate," the man replied. "My friends call me Sim. Any friends of Peter are my friends. Perhaps we can do some business together. Eh?"

"Could be," Phil said, grinning broadly.

Sim transferred his attentions to George.

"So you are Peter's brother," he said. "You take in lots of money. A few dollar bills of the nineteen-forties in nice condition perhaps? We could do business—in a small way, of course. Not enough to attract attention."

"What kind of business?" George asked bluntly, but with a smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. Sim's smile and friendly manner were infectuous.

"Oh," Sim said, shrugging his huge, padded shoulders in a gesture of indifference. "I have a few second hand things. Cameras, typewriters, jewelry, musical instruments. Also, if you have money of the right kind, I can get you new things of all sorts."

"What year is this?" Phil spoke up.

"That I cannot tell you, Phil, my friend," Simal Wate said gravely. "You must understand that I can't tell you things like that. There are strict laws."

"I see what you mean," Phil murmured. "I'm beginning to see the setup. The back room, the lock on the door."

"You are a smart man, Mr. Bacon," Sim purred. "We can certainly do business. You make a profit. I make a profit. Everybody's happy that way. Isn't that right?"

"Sounds all right to me," Phil agreed. He nodded toward the door.

"How about showing us some of your merchandise?"

"Wait right here until I come back," the zoot-suited Sim said.

HE WENT to the door, inserted a key in the lock, and opened it just far enough to slip through. As he disappeared he glanced anxiously over his shoulder to make sure that none of the three men were close enough to follow him before he could get the door closed.

"There's something very crooked here," Phil said with quiet earnestness as soon as Sim had gone.

"Crooked?" Peter echoed. "Then he's bad?"

"I think so," Phil said quickly. "Don't you think so, George? It looks to me like this time travel business is against the law. He wants certain kinds of money. Why? Because those kinds are probably worth an awful lot of money to collectors. He sells Peter a part for his typewriter for twenty-five cents—but it has to be a certain kind of quarter, maybe worth five hundred dollars here. He gives Peter a robot typewriter for three dollars. Probably he sold the three one dollar bills for thousands of dollars. He's a crook. This back room proves it. People who are honest tell you what year it is. They invite you to look around. They don't lock the door behind you."

"I think you're right, Mr. Bacon," George Abbott said. "But what can we do about it?"

"What do I do?" Peter Abbott asked. Phil looked at him. Suddenly he realized that he had touched something elemental in Peter. The man was simple, in his outlook and in his beliefs. He knew only two types of people—good and bad. Now he believed Sim to be bad. Also, Phil felt, Pete felt him, Phil, to be good,

and would do whatever he suggested.

Perhaps—Phil shivered at the thought—perhaps Peter would even kill Sim if he told him to!

The thought scared Phil a little. In a way Peter Abbott was himself a robot—a living robot. He was a big, simple minded, human dog, with a firm grasp on a few elemental thought processes, but with no ability to think things out.

But it gave him comfort to know that Peter was on his side. Now—whatever the year was, it was so far in the future that a quarter minted in the first part of the twentieth century was worth a fortune; and Phil, with his background of years of science fiction and then impossible fiction, was determined to see the world beyond the locked door.

Hastily he was forming a plan. It was more like an idea in a story than anything he would have considered in real life. The thought of deliberately planned violence against a stranger scared him a little. As he turned to Peter Abbott to tell him what to do he hesitated. Wouldn't it just be better to 'do business' with Sim, and get what he could in the way of robot typewriters and such? That would be the sensible thing to do, all right, he thought. But the light of simple faith in Peter's eyes made him realize he had said too much to let things ride. Peter Abbott was waiting for orders.

"This is what we do when Sim comes back in," Phil said. "Peter, you're strong. Don't hurt him, but get hold of him and put him down on the floor on his stomach so we can tie him up. After that we'll decide what to do next."

"Sure," Peter agreed. "That will be easy." He chuckled.

George started to say something. The rattling of the key in the door

stopped him. Sim came in with a small carton.

"Here's the part for your typewriter, Mr. Abbott," he said.

His eyes narrowed suddenly in suspicion. Phil realized the man had noticed the tenseness of their expressions.

Sim had stopped a few feet away from the door. Now he tossed the carton to Pete. "Catch!" he said loudly. The next moment, before anyone could move, he had darted out and closed the door.

PETE HAD reacted instinctively and caught the carton. Phil tried desperately to catch Sim before he got through the door, but failed; and before he could get his hand on the knob and open it again it was locked on the other side.

"Well, Mr. Bacon," George Abbott asked, smiling broadly. "What do we do, now that the fish got off the line?"

Phil grinned wryly.

"I guess the only thing to do is go back where we came from," he said. "It would be too bad for us if Sim shut off that time warp so we got stranded here."

"I could break in the door," Peter suggested hopefully.

Phil shook his head. "No. Let's go home and fix your typewriter. I want to watch it working."

"Sure, Mr. Bacon," Peter said. He walked over and stepped through the rectangular opening.

Nothing happened. Instead of disappearing he merely stepped through to the other side.

"Oh, Lord," Phil groaned. "What a sap I've been. Now we're stuck, but good. But why? Why wouldn't that old Shylock be glad to get rid of us? He could have let us go through and then shut it off and he

would have been rid of us permanently!"

"You will soon find out, Mister Bacon," Sim's voice sounded from a loudspeaker at one corner of the ceiling. "I can't let you go because you would publish what happened, and I would be arrested and corrected."

"Arrested and corrected?" Phil echoed. A sudden hopeful thought came to him. "Why don't you use your time wrap machine to go into the future and find out? If you aren't going to be arrested and corrected you can certainly return us to our own time safely!"

"Foolish man," Sim chuckled. "You live in the era that talked about time but knew nothing about it. I can't find out what is going to happen by going into the future, because it might not happen that way. It might be corrected."

"What do you mean—corrected?" Phil asked, puzzled. "I've read a lot of time travel stories—even wrote a few—but I never heard of that."

"I'll tell you, my friend," Sim's voice came from the loudspeaker. "You have the classic dilemma of the man who went back in time and killed his grandfather when his grandfather was a little boy. Then, if his grandfather was killed before he was old enough to have any children, how could his grandson go back in time to kill him, since he would never be born? The resolution of that dilemma is the key to time. The answer is quite simple. When the man goes back in time and kills his grandfather, and returns to his own time again, he finds to his surprise that he made a mistake. It was not his grandfather at all! And no matter how many times he goes back and kills his grandfather, it is like trying to grab your own thumb poked through your other fist—he always finds he

made a mistake. That is because of correcting."

"I don't get it," Phil said.

"In plain language," Sim said irritably, "if I let you go back you will publish what you know, and the temporal police will track me down and arrest me. But they won't arrest me now. They will arrest me before I sold Peter Abbott his typewriter!"

"I still don't get it," Phil said slowly. "If that happened, then none of Peter Abbott's stories would ever be written, and we wouldn't be here right now. And if we weren't here right now, how could we be here?"

"You probably will never 'get it' as you keep saying," Sim's voice said over the speaker. "But all the past and future are simultaneous in a time that might be considered at right angles to it. In that time, 1955 and—this time here—are both happening now. You can maybe understand it by comparing the dimensions of time with those of space. Any instant of time covers all of space and reality uniformly, so that all things exist in that instant. So an instant is like a straight line in space. The movement of that straight line from the past to the future generates the two dimensional time plane of events in space. The time warp is a field that exists in the third dimension of time.

"**W**HAT I'M getting at," Sim went on. "I don't know enough about it myself to explain it, but every instant of time is moving in two directions in time. You are here now, yes—if you understand that the now you use is a time-point moving at right angles to the time stream you call past and future, and also another point moving at right angles to it. If the time police find out about it you will not be here now in the other time."

"But how could they find out?" George Abbott spoke up.

"Very simple," Sim's voice spoke sarcastically. "They would read about it."

"Read about it?" Phil echoed.

"Yes," Sim answered. "They would read about it if you were allowed to go back to your own time and print it. You would print it, and copies of what you printed it in would still exist today. They would read in those books that Simal Wate was doing black market time-trading, and come here and arrest me."

"I see," Phil said slowly, thinking of the Peter Abbott stories he had already published in *Absurd Stories*. "I suppose you're right. What are you going to do with us, kill us?"

"I don't know," Sim said. "I may have to, but I don't like it. I wish I had sold Mr. Abbott something else so this trouble wouldn't have come up. Always troubles."

"But," Phil said eagerly. "If I printed that information in my own time it would already be in existence in this time, and you would already be arrested, wouldn't you?"

"No," Sim answered. "Because, as I told you, whether that occurs or not, it lies in a future at right angles to all time as we experience it normally, and the time warp doesn't go into that future. In that future you might not even have ever been born!"

"Let's get this straight," Phil said. "Take some given instant—say, two o'clock in the afternoon on March twelfth, nineteen fifty. All over the entire universe things were in such and such positions and states of action. At ten minutes before and after that time most things were different than at that instant. What you're trying to say is that there is another time stream, in which that instant is forever that instant in our time, but

things move about in that time stream just as they do in the regular one. Always at two o'clock on that date, though. Right?"

"If you say so," Sim agreed tiredly. "But it isn't quite that way. They stay where and when they are unless they are lifted out and moved about, like the time-warp lifted you out of your time and dropped you into this time. In the other time stream all things are naturally stationary. It's only a theory anyway. It was invented to explain the operation of the time-wrap field and account for it being possible to alter events that have already happened."

"I think I'm beginning to get it." Phil said, his eyes on the loudspeaker as if it were the man he was talking to.

Now he turned to see if George Abbott had understood anything about it. Neither George nor Peter were anywhere in the room.

As he looked about wildly, fearing to be all alone, a slender white arm appeared in midair and motioned for him to come to it.

He glanced anxiously over his shoulder at the silent loudspeaker, then went over to the arm and took a firm but gentle hold on the manicured fingers. Instantly most of the arm vanished. He felt a firm tug as the hand tried to lead him forward.

He thought of a checkerboard and a hand lifting a piece and moving it to some other square. Then, closing his eyes, he stepped forward in the direction the hand was leading.

"**M**ARY!" he exclaimed. When he stepped through the time warp he saw that it was Mary Worth's hand he held onto. She was greeting him with an impudent smile. "What—how?" He stopped in bewilderment.

Around him were the tall, silent trees, and the path that ended abruptly between two trees was only a few feet away. George and Peter Abbott were there. But there were also several men dressed in zoot-suitish clothes similar to those worn by Sim.

Even though they wore such bizarre suits they had the indefinable something that marks all law officers, whether police or some other enforcement agency.

"Surprised?" Mary asked demurely. "You invited me along, you know."

"Are you—" Phil began. "I see it all now. You're one of the time-police, and you got a job working for me so you could find out who was writing stories with a robot typewriter."

There was a light of regret and disappointment in his eyes that Mary saw and interpreted.

"That's right, Phil," she said.

The zoot-suited men were disappearing one by one through thin air at the spot where Phil had found himself when he arrived. Each of them carried a queer looking blunt tube which Phil guessed to be some sort of weapon.

The last man to vanish paused and kissed Mary.

"I'll be seeing you soon, darling," he said. Then, with a friendly grin at Phil, he stepped out of sight into the time-warp.

Mary saw the look of utter dejection on Phil's face. She laughed delightedly.

"That's my brother," she explained. "He's one of the time-police, and he got the special assignment for me to be your secretary."

She stooped down and picked up an object like the ones each of the time-police had carried with them. Her finger slid a knob on it a quarter of an inch. Then she dropped it

into her purse.

"Is that all the bigger the time-warp gadget is?" Phil asked in amazement.

"Yes, that's all," Mary replied, hooking her arm in his. "We'd better get going. It'll be getting dark soon."

Peter Abbott, carrying the part to his typewriter, took the lead. Mary walked along beside Phil, and before many steps they were walking hand in hand. She was explaining things as they walked along.

"The first that this was brought to our attention," she began, "was when we learned that a publishing company had sued a typewriter company for selling them a robot typer that was imitating stories written a thousand years ago. The typewriter company had given them a new typewriter, but the publishing company claimed that their business had been hurt.

"In court it came out that the Peter Abbott whose stories the robot had been imitating were written by the robot itself. Semantics proved that. The only way that could be possible is for some time-trader to be black marketeering.

"We were called in by the court. We found that the typewriter company had sold the typer for scrap. They hadn't kept a record of whom it had been sold to, so we had to work from this end. That's where I came in. My job was to trace down the typer, and if possible to find out who had sold it to whoever had it."

"So you followed me out here," Phil said.

"That's right, Phil," Mary said with a timid smile. "Only I did it by going back to the future and coming to Spokane in a faster plane than you did."

"You could have come by slow freight and then returned to a time

before I got here, couldn't you?" Phil asked.

"Mm-mm," Mary objected. "There's lots of things about time travel that aren't that easy. Anyway, to get back to what happened, I followed you from Spokane, and the time-police were with me. You never looked back once!"

"Huh!" Phil grunted. "I just thought of something. The typer was scrapped because it was writing stories exactly like the ones it had written a thousand years before it was manufactured, so it was sold for scrap—and it wrote those stories a thousand years before it was manufactured because it had been scrapped for imitating them. If that isn't a worse dilemma than the one about the man going back in time and killing his grandfather when he was a child, I'll eat my hat!"

THE FOUR walked along in silence. The gloom of dusk was settling around them as they walked under the tall Pines, Peter in the lead, Mary and Phil walking hand in hand, and George in back.

After awhile Phil glanced at Mary. She returned his glance. Each saw a reflection of their inner thoughts on the other's face and turned away guiltily.

"I suppose you'll be returning to the future soon," Phil said gruffly.

Mary didn't answer.

"But what will happen now?" Phil continued. "Sim said the time police would correct things. I suppose that means it will be as if the Peter Abbott stories had never been. The dilemma will be wiped out, huh?"

"I don't know, Phil," Mary replied. "That will be for the courts to decide. We were talking about it on the trip out from Spokane to Pulaski Junction. I think they're going to

recommend that things be only partially corrected. I—I had an idea I thought was good, and still do."

"What's that?" Phil asked.

"The immediate past and the present will have to be corrected," Mary said. "But sometimes correcting is done by what is called a parallel substitution of events. In this case I suggested to my brother that he recommend that Peter's brain be corrected, and that he become a writer. Then he will have written the stories himself—oh, maybe not the same stories, nor even quite as phenomenal, but good Impossible Fiction."

"Think the courts will agree to it?" Phil asked eagerly.

"I think so," Mary said. "Also I'm hoping another suggestion I made will be carried through. You seem to have a lot of trouble keeping secretaries, and—and I—sort of—like the job—and maybe the boss."

"Would they? I mean, do you?" Phil said, putting his arm around her.

"It won't do any harm to tell you, Phil," Mary said. "I sort of love you. But—"

"When is all this correcting going to take place?" Phil asked, kissing her.

"As soon as the court hands down its ruling on the—"

There was just the faintest warning before the forest and the scene blurred out of existence, and—

PHIL BACON glanced up from the manuscript he was editing as the office boy brought in the slim stack of mail. Ralph Hargrave, his assistant editor, took the letters and began to absently slit them open and read them.

Phil returned to his editing, fighting the boredom within him. The story was lousy—but they all were

lousy. It was a question of choosing the least lousy of the lot to put in Absurd Stories.

He sighed. It was too bad that science fiction had had to go. Too many of the authors were making lucky guesses about things, and incorporating devices into their stories that were top secret in the war department.

Now those same authors were trying to earn a living by writing stories that even they themselves couldn't believe in. He forced his eyes to focus on the typewritten page.

"All the past and future are simultaneous in a time that might be considered at right angles to it," the manuscript read. "In that time stream Columbus is discovering America and the great Chicago fire and the gold rush to California and Lindberg crossing the Atlantic are all happening in the same instant."

Phil shook his head to keep awake. His eyes focused again with difficulty.

"In this right-angle time stream all those events are stationary," the manuscript continued. "Only the time-warp field can change them—and changing them is changing the past and the future to something else."

"Those guys make me mad," Ralph Hargrove exclaimed violently. He rumbled the letter he had been reading and tossed it into the waste basket. "This one said, 'Not only does the entire contents of the June Absurd Stories live up to the standard of Impossible Fiction by being provably impossible, but also the usual standard of Absurd Stories by being provably not even fifth rate fiction—except by an Absurd stretch of imagination.' The IFFans ought to have their ears pinned back!"

Phil's eyes fixed on the letter in the waste basket. He sighed.

"The guy's right," he said.

"That's what makes me so mad," Ralph said bitterly. "All our authors are in a rut and there's nothing we can do about it."

"We might try getting some new authors," Phil suggested maliciously.

"Where we going to get them?" Ralph jeered. "Out of fandom? Those guys groan about the stories we put out; but when they write one and send it in it's even worse than the ones they feud about for being so terrible. Nuts!"

"Maybe," Phil said. "You know, it might be a good policy to write and ask those guys that think our stories so rotten to try their own hand. Maybe one of them might develop into a good writer if he got started."

He rose wearily from his desk and crossed over to Ralph's waste basket. He picked out the crumpled letter and smoothed it out, and skimmed its contents. Suddenly he chuckled.

"Did you notice the name of the guy that wrote it?" he asked.

"No," Ralph said. "I didn't get that far in it. Why?"

"His name is Peter Abbott," Phil said, his eyes twinkling.

"Peter Rabbit?" Ralph breathed. "No! Now I've heard everything!"

"At least it would be a refreshing change to have an author with the name, Peter Abbott," Phil chuckled. "I think I'll write him and suggest he try writing a story for us. No matter how punk it may turn out, it might have some good ideas in it." He frowned thoughtfully. "You know, Ralph, I've got a hunch this is going to turn out O.K. I can give him a quarter of a cent—"

Something inside him seemed to revolt.

"No!" he said. "I'm going to pay

him top rates this time. What am I talking about—"THIS time!"? I must be nuts!"

"Ain't it the truth," Ralph murmured.

Phil read the lengthy letter over again and chuckled.

"Peter Abbott has a knack of picking the right words to express himself," he said. "Even his insults are literary gems. You know, I like the guy already."

HE GRINNED in delight at Ralph's wry expression and pushed the button on his desk that would summon his secretary. A moment later a young lady came in with pencil and shorthand book. Phil blinked at her in startled amazement.

"Ye gods!" he exclaimed. "Can't I keep ONE secretary more than a week?"

He blinked at the new secretary some more. Something strange was happening inside of him. He hid it by leering at her. Then he turned to his assistant editor and winked.

"Ralph," he said. "Would you mind leaving the office for a while. We want to be," he cast a lewd glance at the young lady, "alone."

"No," Ralph said. "I want to watch."

The young lady smiled. She was still smiling when she sat down and opened her shorthand book. Phil's eyes vacillated between her knees the poised pencil. The poised pencil won out.

"Take a letter to—" He searched the letter in his hand. "To Peter Abbott, Pulaski Junction, Washington. Dear Mr. Abbott, colon. Strange though it may seem to you, it is not our fault that the stories in Absurd Stories are so punk. We are continually searching for new talent dash

new writers with new and entertaining ideas and ways of expressing them. And perhaps it will come as a surprise to you that we like your style of expressing your ideas. Why don't you direct your obvious talent into a channel that will do both of us some good?"

Phil interrupted his dictation to look into the young lady's eyes. They were a deep, sparkling blue. They held something that made his heart do things to his ribs.

"What did you say your name was?" he asked, trying to make the question sound casual.

"Mary Worth," she said.

"Mary Worth... Mary Worth..."

Phil tasted the sound of the name. "Let's see. Where were we? Oh yes. What I would like for you to do, Mr.

Abbott, is write out a story as long or as short as you please, built around the ideas you have as to what makes a good impossible story. I think you will find as you go along that it will come fairly easy to you. And for the first story don't worry about style or anything other than just getting your ideas down on paper in story form. I will pay you a cent a word—"

"A cent?" Mary Worth mocked.

"Three cents," Phil said. "I'm crazy."

Mary smiled at him, the corners of her mouth twitching mischievously, as if at some secret, inner amusement.

"About you, baby," Phil completed the sentence. "Hey!" he exclaimed as her pencil made marks on the notebook. "Wait! Don't put that in the letter!"

IS THIS OUR FUTURE? ...

BY

RALPH KELLY

KLAN WALKED slowly through the rubble heaps. Despair and loneliness and bitterness were inscribed deeply in his face. He held the heavy automatic rifle tightly to him.

The wind was strong and bit through the heavy leather coat he wore. Besides it was beginning to tear. Klan thought about the coat. He could still see the Sov's face as the bullets struck him. He remembered how the devil had tried to put a heat beam on him. Well, he got his.

Klan thought about the people and wondered when he'd see some. This wandering, endlessly and hopelessly was a futile existence. He knew the warfare that went on between every little hamlet since governments no longer existed. This city, whose ruins he was traversing, was one of the few which were not radioactive or still biologically contaminated.

No human can ever trust another one, he thought. But it couldn't be, for no human could continue this barren lonesomeness. I think I'd be happy to see a Sov, Klan felt; I wouldn't even blast him.

But the bitterness and hatred and distrust were still too deep. When you roamed a war-ravaged country like this, you could always, you had to always assume that anybody else was an enemy and you had to strike first.

Klan's thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a bit of motion. He wasn't quite sure.

He dropped to his belly and watched. Waiting was no novelty to him. He lifted the automatic rifle with the explosive radioactive pellets to his cheek and took careful sight at the pile of rubble behind which something had moved.

He waited. Five minutes. Then ten. Abruptly there was a stirring. A figure stood up, sure it was safe. It started to walk directly toward Klan's prone body behind the little hill of rubble, apparently unaware. Klan tensed. Should he fire or wait? Maybe it was a trick. He waited in spite of his training which told him of the danger.

Then he caught his breath. It was a girl! He waited until she was only five feet away. Then he stood up. She screamed, a frightened agonized cry. She knew what strange men would do. Klan seized her just as she drew a knife and managed to rake him across the cheek.

She started to cry. Klan released one arm and slapped her across the face. Then he began talking in low tone. Finally he released both hands.

"We can't be alone like this," he reasoned. "Stay with me and I'll work for you."

The girl looked up astonished. No one had ever said such a thing to her. She started to cry again. This time Klan took her in his arms.

He wouldn't be alone any longer...

MONORAIL MONSTER

BY
GUY GREENE

N'YAWK. Twenty-five hundred. Terminal Center. Monotrains to Keens—Monotrains to Manns—Monotrains to Brooks—Monotrains to Hudson Palisades...

The handsome young pilot watched the teeming masses of people roll and split and converge like some gigantic wave. The vast wash of humanity selected its monorails to all points of the huge urban community that was N'Yawk. Manson felt the thrill of it. In spite of his brief training he knew that he would make this furious run perfectly.

A surge of pride and power lifted him. To him and others like him the responsibility of delivering these hordes to their destination was a signal honor. Others might describe it as routine but then they had never sat behind the power throttle of a hundred-mile-an-hour monorail and felt its bone-crushing acceleration in response to the touch of a lever.

Manson's eyes shone with pride as they traveled down the gleaming magnalloy length of the Monorail. It was a three hundred foot, articulated length of metal cylinder, suspended from a single rail and driven by surging magnetic fields. Its doors gaped wide and passengers poured into its comfortable interior. Many commuted hun-

dreds of miles each day but in the Monotrains it was like taking a cross-country rocket as fast and as simple. The Monorail loaded to capacity. The doors slithered shut. Pilot Manson stepped into his cabin in the nose. A red light winked on the dash-panel. A speaker shuddered; "Manson—twelve thirty-two—full speed—no stops—the Palisades."

Manson muttered acknowledgment into the phone, checked the safety lights and touched the throttle. Effortlessly, controlling the gigantic pressure of acceleration, Manson held the Monorail in leash. He breathed a sigh of relief. The Monorail shot like a projectile between monstrous structures, then flashed breathlessly into the countryside.

Only the hiss of parting air and the whine of the generators disturbed the cathedral-like silence of the pilot cab. Thirty minutes later Manson braked the flexible metal car to its first stop.

"Terminal Eighteen," the speaker squawked.

"Got it," Manson answered, "Monorail Seventy-two, under Manson, pulling in on time!" Pride ran like fire through his veins. This was the life!

* * *

WE GROW OUR AIR!

BY
HOWARD GORMAN

THE FIRST time people see the Air Gardens in Luna City, they're usually startled. And it has to be admitted they are an impressive sight. In the vast room whose ceiling blazes with artificial light there are acres and acres of brilliant green plants, that grow proliferously in their beds of water. Mechanical harvesters running on guides trim and keep the foliage from strangling itself.

But it is the purpose of these Air Gardens that strikes one. Luna City is probably the most gigantic modern mechanical and electrical maze in the Solar System. To build a city on an airless Moon is a miracle of modern engineering. Luna City is that miracle.

Consequently, when people are first told that they're to visit the "Air Gardens" they assume that some press-agent has dreamed up a name for a mass of pumps and machinery for creating the air of the city. Hence it is always satisfying to see the amazement on their faces when they're brought into the vast garden.

Creating artificial air for breathing purposes is no easy task. You can use chemicals like potassium chlorate or carry liquid oxygen as some of the rockets do, but

these are makeshift methods, costly and inefficient. Furthermore the resulting air has the flat slightly nauseating quality of any chemical factory. You have to go back to nature for the best.

The Air Gardens on Luna are the perfect example. Here, plants functioning through their photosynthetic cycle, absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Because nitrogen is not absorbed, and because the calculations have been carefully balanced, the system of plants and people is in perfect equilibrium.

We exhale the carbon dioxide after inhaling the oxygen. The plants do the reverse. Simple, neat and effective!

The visitor's initial disappointment at not seeing an impressive array of pumps in the Air Gardens, changes to admiration at the sight of the luxuriously blooming plants among which the technicians have planted a wide variety of flowers, which add the note of beauty. It is as if a bit of Earth has been transported to the cold bleakness of space, and has thrived.

Felton reports that the hydroponic plant system is not being installed in a wide variety of space ships. This will enormously simplify their technology.

The LAST ORBIT

By Charles Dye

When a scientist's reckless experiment brought Earth to the brink of destruction, her only hope lay with a man already doomed

"THE WORLD is coming to an end, Mr. Hunt!" Cordell, the director of Power Unlimited, swiveled around in his chair, propped a knee against the massive desk in front of him, and puffed on his cigar. "Oh, not tomorrow, or the next day, or even next month. But next year—that's what we have to worry

about! I suppose that surprises you."

John Hunt said nothing. He wasn't surprised at what Cordell had just said. He had stopped being surprised at anything long ago—when he had learned about the incurable little lump inside his brain which, at any moment, might mean death. Probably this was what had made him a suc-

Her eyes still closed after he had kissed her, Lois did not see him take out the weapon. "See you in a couple of years," he said, and pulled the trigger





cess in a profession where the old saw about the first mistake being the last, never held truer. With the World State still suffering from birth pangs and Power Unlimited trying to gain control of it, there was always business.

Cordell continued: "A certain nuclear mathematician of ours named Gilbert Mitford, was, with our sanction, doing illegal experimental work on the internal atomic structure of the Earth—in the interests of discovering cheaper and quicker methods of manufacturing power. However, three days ago, right in the middle of things, Mitford, a brilliant man, suffered a mental collapse and disappeared.

"A number of artificial stresses and strains were set up inside the Earth's core by Mitford. This stress-strain synthesis was to be temporary, lasting not more than six hours. Mitford disappeared three days ago just before the end of that six hour period. Every day the activity curve of the stress-strain graph is mounting higher and higher. Another year, and the Earth's core will theoretically collapse. No one can follow Mitford's mathematics—the major portion of which he carried in his head—clearly enough to shut off the stasis. The already slightly altered nuclear structure will require, even from Mitford, a complete new set of equations to compensate for the damage currently done."

Hunt, for a moment, again said nothing. Cordell and his henchmen were sure to have rockets hidden away somewhere. No wonder he could mention this impending catastrophe with no more emotion than someone discussing a building about to be torn down. If the blow-up did come they wouldn't be here. They had seen to that first of all. But

everyone else would. Enough space-ships couldn't be built for them. Hunt looked squarely at Cordell and smiled. "Why not appeal to the World Council?"

"Appealing to the World Council for aid is useless. First, they would smash Unlimited for illegal experimentation. My brother and I have worked too long and hard to allow that ever to happen. Even Unlimited isn't strong enough yet to withstand the Council. Secondly, we already have the best scientific brains in the world working for us. And if they can't do anything...

"But to your half of the problem, Hunt: We, who admittedly are not experts in the field of hunting, cannot find a trace of Mitford. It seems inconceivable that he could disappear so completely without the help of someone. But apparently he has. However, Mr. Hunt, that is up to you to verify. Then, of course, you will find Mitford and bring him to us, where, in the hope that it's not too late, he will immediately undergo psychiatric treatment."

So now I'm going to be a World Saver, Hunt thought.

"Here is a dossier on Mitford with complete data and photographs. You might begin by checking on this Miles woman. Six months ago he came close to marrying her. Also, here is something I advise you to make use of—it may save you a lot of talking." Cordell held out in his hand a glass and metal object resembling a hypogun. "Those amber colored pellets in the loading chamber are a derivative of scopolamine and pentothal. Fire the hypo within six inches of the skin, and the drug, by osmosis, will be instantly absorbed into the blood stream, completely knocking out all mental censors. A true truth serum. Pump

'em full of this, and they'll tell things they didn't even think they knew. Uh—unfortunately, we'll never be able to market the stuff because it semipermanently knocks out the censors, leaving the victim, for a year or two, with no will of his own."

Cordell stood up and walked around to the front of his desk. "I'm already quite impressed with you, Hunt. You've said hardly a word—a favorable sign, I assume, meaning that future actions are intended to speak louder than present words."

"I hope so," Hunt said, surprised at the steadiness of his voice.

LATE THAT night, John Hunt walked into a quiet little bar off Fifth Avenue called The Robot. No chrome, no glitter, no video, no noisy bartender. Only the change booth, one inconspicuous bouncer and the soft atmosphere of a summer evening.

Since talking with Cordell, he had learned that Lois Miles, after being jilted by Mitford, had become something of a solitary lush, frequenting The Robot in particular. He had hoped she would put in an appearance tonight.

After getting change, he made his way to a secluded section of the long bar, immediately inserting a coin and pressing the double rye button. For five endless seconds he stared at his reflection in the huge, smoke-tinted mirror behind the bar until his drink popped up. He didn't look like a World Saver. His face was curved like a satyr's and his hair was much too black and shiny. He smiled. Some woman had once said he had a profile like a Greek god. He hoped he still had it, because he was intending to pick Miles up. After that, the rest would be easy. Why not? Hadn't little things been the

hardest for him all his life, and big things always the easiest? Now all he needed was to drop dead just as he was about to find Mitford. That would even ring tears from the Mask of Comedy.

After punching another drink, he stared unseeingly into the smoke-tinted mirror, his brain turning over and over....

Sometime later, he noticed a curious thing: there seemed to be a pool of moonlight to the left of his reflection in the mirror. It dazzled his imagination. Turning, he saw the pool of moonlight was Lois Miles. She was wearing a severely tailored suit of blue serge which fit her curves like a second layer of skin. It contrasted with her hair—the pool of moonlight—as night contrasts with day. He saw her reflection smile as she caught him staring at her in the mirror.

"Where'd you come from—the Moon?" he asked.

She laughed. "Yes, I flew down on a moonbeam."

"What made you pick this place to land?"

"Oh—I wanted to kill some time."

"Why kill time? Kill yourself; it's simpler."

"Then what are you doing here?"

It was his turn to laugh. "I really don't know...waiting for you, I guess." They both laughed at the cliché.

She smiled warmly at him. "And what are you staring at?"

"Your possibilities."

"I don't even know your name."

"John."

She smiled again. "John what? Besides, it's awfully late—"

"Johnny-Come-Lately. Is that good enough?"

She touched his arm. "You know, I like you—but I've really got to go.

"I'm still a poor working girl."

"Then I'll see you home, if you'll give me a drink?"

"All right, Johnny-Come-Lately—I only live up the block."

"**WHICH POISON** will it be, Mr. Come-Lately? There's everything from beer to vodka—"

"Whatever you have."

"Then it'll be fancy—because I'm having champagne laced with Scotch."

"Isn't that liable to put us both on a Lost Weekend?"

"Yes, I'm hoping so."

"Don't poor working girls have to get up and go to work in the morning?"

"I've decided to take the day off and celebrate."

"Celebrate what?"

"Finding you."

"You're drunk."

"So are you."

He leaned back on the couch and gazed up through the skylight at the stars glistening wetly like a sky full of tears. They reminded him of a fragment of verse by MacNiece, he'd once learned in his youth:

*Double the guard, says Authority.
Treble the bars;*

*Holes in the sky, says the child
Scanning the stars.*

Somebody named Walton had just flown to one of those holes in the sky. So now Mars was to belong to Earth, as only a year ago the Moon had belonged. Until he'd learned the devastating news about the tumor inside his skull, he'd once wanted to be one of the first out among the stars. Her voice reached him.

"Here's your drink. Hey! If you stare at those stars too long, they'll hypnotize you and steal your soul."

"They already have—long ago."

"I took this place because of the skylights. There's one even in the bath."

He took his drink and watched her cross the rich wine carpet to the color organ.

"Something soft and pastel?" Her voice was like that of a sleepy thrush. Without waiting for an answer, she selected a tape and inserted it in the player section. Then she turned out the single lamp and sat down beside him.

For awhile they said nothing, listening to the music and watching the hypnotic color abstractions flash and dissolve on the wall.

"Kiss me," she said in a smoky voice.

He quietly felt in his coat pocket until he touched something cold and hard. Bending down suddenly, he kissed her, bringing up the hypogun. Pressing it lightly on her neck, he squeezed the trigger. There was a faint pop.

"See you again, maybe, in a couple of years," he said as she stiffened, then went limp.

Quickly he got up. Turning off the color organ, he crossed to the door and made certain the night-chain was fastened. Then he laid her lengthwise on the couch and sat down on the edge.

"Lois."

"Yes..." She said it faintly—as if from far away.

"You once knew Mitford?"

"Yes."

"Where is he?"

"Don't know..."

"He disappeared several days ago. Do you know any reason why?"

"No."

At that moment, there was a thud and the sound of ripping wood. He turned to see part of the door along with the night-chain clattering to the

floor. A dumpy little man appeared in the doorway pointing a .38 Noiseless at him.

"O.K.—" But that was as far as the little man got. Seconds earlier, Hunt had jerked out his own Noiseless, and now there was a neat round hole in the middle of the little man's chest as he lay coughing blood on the floor.

Hunt jumped up and dragged the still breathing body inside the room. He carefully closed the remains of the door, propping a heavy chair against them. Then he picked up the little man's gun and placed it in Lois' hand. He told her to sit up and point the gun at the door, and if anybody stuck their head in, she was to blast them.

"Goddamn you!" he heard the little man hiss through clenched teeth as he ran past him into the bathroom.

HE STEPPED up on the edge of the tub, grasped the shower curtain rod and boosted himself up into sitting position on it. Bracing him by putting one foot against a huge mirrored cosmetics chest, he started banging away on the skylight with the butt of his gun. The little man probably had friends waiting downstairs, but he hoped not on the roof.

After the glass was knocked out and he was putting his gun away, he thought he saw a flicker in the chest mirror. Whirling, he fired, toppling to the floor as he did so.

The gun in Lois' hand clattered to the floor. Slowly her eyes and nose and mouth disappeared under a curtain of blood. Then she toppled backwards...

There was silence except for the sighing of the wind through the skylight.

He was devastated at what had

just happened. He tried to move but his nerves seemed dead. Dazedly he watched her hair turn to red as the scarlet pool in which her head lay grew larger and larger.

He walked back into the other room. He felt like kicking the little man, but what was the use of kicking a dead man. Before dying, the little man must have observed that Lois was under some sort of drug and had told her to go into the next room and shoot him.

The night wind was cool on his sweating face as he squeezed through the skylight onto the roof. No one was in sight. He started running across the rooftops towards Sixth Avenue where there was an air-cab station.

Two people dead—and all for nothing. He would have to start all over now. He had learned nothing, except that someone wanted him out of the way. He slowed to a walk as he came up to the air-cab platform.

"Mr. John Hunt?" a voice behind him said.

As he started to turn, someone smashed him over the head with a bottle. He could hear the tinkling glass as he fell into a black sea of unconsciousness...

SHINY SPEARS of light and darkness shot through his head as he slowly fought his way back to awareness. He was lying in front of a huge booted foot, and when he tried to sit up and see above the foot, it drew back and kicked him savagely between the eyes.

"That's for bumping Shorty," someone said.

Again he slid down into smothering darkness...

And once more, the pieces of his consciousness fell into place. This time, he found himself inside a fly-

ing suit propped up between two men. Sitting across from them, was another man staring out the window with a gun in his lap. Hunt noticed he had an abnormally straight line from his neck through the back of his head—the perfect bone structure for a killer, he thought.

The man turned and grinned at Hunt. "Hey, boys—the great white hunter is trying to open his eyes. Why don't you give him a little eye opener?"

The man on Hunt's left jammed a flask into his half closed mouth and tilted it upwards. Liquid fire raced down his throat. Choking and coughing, he spewed the whole mouthful straight into the eyes of the man across from him. With a howl of pain, the man clawed at his eyes and Hunt dived for the gun. He was stopped midway by powerful hands which instantly threw both his arms into paralyzing half nelsons. The other man cleared his eyes, picked up his gun and, with the butt, smashed Hunt squarely across the mouth. Hunt's eyes watered with pain as blood and a broken tooth fell from his mouth.

After a while, the man on his left said: "That's all right. Go ahead and call Louie names. At least he won't kick you again. He thinks he broke his toe that first time."

"Where are we going?" Hunt said thickly between broken lips.

"To the North Pole."

Everything was hazy and muddled in his mind. "Why the North Pole?" he heard himself asking.

"To visit Santy Claus!"

Everybody laughed—even Louie.

THE DOOR of the plane opened and he was pushed out into win-dy sunlight. The Arctic whiteness contrasted dazzlingly with a sky the

color of blue ice. The sun, a sullen ball of reddish-orange, glimmered balefully through a murky haze covering the horizon. The long night was about to fall again. A heavy gust of wind swept a cloud of stinging snow particles and powdered ice over the men. Someone gave him a rough shove in the direction of a long low hill of glittering snow. His head and feet, uncovered by the heated flying suit he still wore, were already numb with the freezing cold. His mouth had stopped bleeding but he was unable to close it. Every time he breathed, the sub-zero air hit his broken tooth, sending chills of pain into his head.

They plodded on. No one said anything. Once he glanced over his shoulder and noticed that the plane was gone. Indigo twilight gradually deepened into midnight blue and stars began to glisten like a handful of diamonds suddenly sprinkled across the sky.

He was near collapse when they finally came to the hill which turned out to be a perfectly camouflaged building. Directly in front of them an opening appeared. Again he was given a savage push and this time he was sent sprawling. Picking himself up, he managed to stumble through into a tremendous corridor. He was too weak to notice much, but it must have been of immense size. The boot-ed footfalls of his captors echoed off the walls like rifle shots.

At last they came to the corridor's end and stepped inside a waiting elevator that immediately shot down like a rocket. He collapsed on the floor.

He awoke just as a man in white—probably a doctor—was leaving with an instrument tray. He found himself in bed in a small white room.

"You're all right. Get dressed,"

the doctor said disinterestedly.

Hunt didn't like the way his head was pounding, though. Probably mild concussion from that bottle and Louie's boot. He lay there for a moment, recalling all that had happened. Who was running this show? Mitford? If so, instead of getting to Mitford first, Mitford had gotten to him. Well, he might as well wait and find out the score before trying anything dangerous.

He managed to get dressed and had just discovered that both hypogun and Noiseless were missing, when the door was opened by the man in white. Another man, in a grey uniform with gun holster, was with him.

"Keep in front of the guard. He will give you directions." The man in white disappeared down the corridor in the opposite direction.

"Straight ahead and no talking," said the guard, directing Hunt through countless archways and corridors.

Then through another archway and into a luxuriously panelled corridor with indirect lighting. At the first door they came to, the guard told him to halt. A button was pressed and after a moment of soft clicks, the door swung open.

"You're on your own now," said the guard.

HUNT HEARD the door close behind him as he walked into a long, low room furnished like an office-apartment. The lighting was all soft focus, giving the pastel walls and airflow furniture an atmosphere of quiet richness. At the far end was a gigantic video screen, dwarfing the desk and man in front of it. The man who was watching the screen suddenly turned, facing Hunt.

Hunt, for just an instant, felt as though an electric shock had passed

through him, stiffening his muscles.

The man was Cordell!

"Well, Mr. Hunt. Please draw up a chair." Cordell picked up a .38 from the desk and toyed with it.

At this point, Hunt found he was having difficulty thinking coherently, and his head was starting to pound again.

"I see the dirty-work boys had a little trouble bringing you here," Cordell continued in a hearty manner. "And I suppose, from the look on your face, you want to be reassured that two and two still add up to four.

"Yes, I'm Cordell, but not *Cordell*—just his twin brother. There—that much should help you find your mental tongue. Now, if you like, you can start the whys."

"Why am I here?"

"You're a dangerous man, Hunt: and up till now, an exceedingly lucky one. We couldn't leave you running around loose to discover where Mitford was. My brother and all of Power Unlimited would have been up here sooner or later if we hadn't grabbed you when we did."

"Then why didn't you kill me?" Hunt said, concealing his growing apprehension.

"Unlimited has a wave-band attuned to the electrical impulses of your nervous system which is non-directional until you die. Then it becomes directional, giving the exact location of the individual. We couldn't kill you because no matter where we tried to take you, you would have been discovered. And once the vicinity was located, Unlimited with its scientific resources might have traced the people or thing responsible for your death."

"Where is Mitford?"

"Right here, of course." Cordell chuckled. "It was all so simple: I

received a communique from my brother explaining what had happened and the possible consequences. Shortly after that, my personal agents had the good fortune of finding Mitford." Cordell laughed. "Then, in a later communique, we learned that the fabulous services of a man-hunter called Mr. Hunt had been engaged. So—we picked you up before your fabulous services could be of any use to my brother."

"How did you know I was going to be where I was?"

"Oh, the girl was the first thing we thought of. We figured you would get around to her sooner or later, as Mitford tried to do before we picked him up."

Hunt was puzzled. "Doesn't Unlimited know anything about this?"

"My brother thinks I'm a frustrated megalomaniac. So he stuck me up here on top of the world in charge of Unlimited's private spaceship factory. He told me I could content myself with dreams of the conquest of space for Power Unlimited. But—" and Cordell laughed again—"that's all obviously changed now. Tomorrow night we leave for the dark side of the Moon, taking every rocket and, of course, Mitford with us. My poor brother will have to stay here with everyone else, knowing full well what will happen at the end of the year without Mitford. That is, unless he comes to my terms and gives me everything I want. Which is *everything*!"

AS HUNT listened to Cordell, waves of light and heat and darkness kept pulsing through his brain. If he could only find some way of killing himself before tomorrow, wouldn't Unlimited's emissaries instantly be jetting up here...if what *this* Cordell said was true.

Without thinking, Hunt made a lunge for Cordell's gun and felt his hand jerk it away from the desk and up to his own temple. He squeezed the trigger—

Nothing happened. Again he squeezed it... After a long moment, he was aware of Cordell's laughter.

"That's a personalized gun, Mr. Hunt. Every fire-arm in this place is personalized. Unless the print of your trigger finger matches the fingerprint inside the photo-cell, the gun can't fire. No—I think you will find it impossible to kill yourself.

Cordell pressed a button. "Guard,—take this man back to the dispensary."

As if in a dream, Hunt was aware of hurling the gun straight at Cordell's face. Cordell tried to put up his hands—but not in time. There was a crunch as the weapon bounced off his forehead and fell to the floor. Cordell slumped in his chair.

Wildly, Hunt looked around for something with a cutting edge. He grabbed an antique letter opener. Seizing Cordell's hand at the same time, he placed Cordell's right forefinger on the edge of the desk and started cutting. The opener was too dull—it wouldn't cut through the bone. There was a sharp snap as he broke the finger backwards and finished the job.

Picking up the Noiseless, he stared at Cordell—and started to place the severed finger against the trigger. Instead, he wrapped up the finger in Cordell's breast-pocket handkerchief and stuck it in his own inner pocket along with the gun.

Then he propped Cordell up in his chair, swivelled him around facing the vedio, took a cigar from the humidor, puffed furiously on it to ignite it, and stuck it into Cordell's mouth. All done just in time to hear

the clinking of the vaultlike door.

Cordell must have been insane to have let him in here without being properly guarded, he thought, watching the door swing open.

"All right! Out here," said the guard. But Hunt was already halfway there. Once, his heart almost stopped when the guard glanced rather curiously at Cordell. Fortunately, the cigar was still smoking.

THEY TOOK a different route back to the dispensary. Soon they were passing through an archway and out onto a railed catwalk overlooking a huge pit lighted from every conceivable angle by immense flood lamps. At the bottom, standing upright on a tremendous expanse of floor, were three two-hundred foot rockets. They gleamed and shimmered like oversized needles, casting reflections high up overhead onto a gigantic pleated roof. The immensity of the scene took Hunt's breath away.

Finally, back at his room, Hunt waited for the guard to open the door. As he stepped through, he yanked the guard in after him. The guard let out a yell that was muffled by Hunt kicking the door shut.

Hunt fumbled in his pocket as the guard jerked out a tear-gas pistol. Then he had the finger out of the bloody handkerchief and onto the Noiseless' trigger. Blood spattered from the guard's hand and the gas gun clattered to the floor.

Hunt threw him the handkerchief. "Tie your hand up in that and take me to Mitford!"

The guard, gritting his teeth with pain, finished wrapping his hand, and at a motion from Hunt, opened the door.

"Now where's Mitford!"

"Across the corridor."

"Show me!"

They walked out of the room and across the hall to a door diagonally opposite the one Hunt had just closed. As the guard placed his hand on the knob, the door opened and the man in white started to step out.

Hunt pressed Cordell's finger against the Noiseless and the man fell backwards with a gaping hole in his chest. Hunt pushed the guard into the room and slammed the door.

He recognized Mitford from photos in the dossier. He lay in a big bed staring up blankly at nothing, not glancing over at what had happened or saying a word.

Hunt turned to the guard. "Get him dressed."

While the guard obeyed, Hunt dragged the body of the other man over to the bed. Mitford was probably doped, he thought, as he watched the guard order him out of bed and into his clothes. Mitford did all of these things like an automaton.

With the guard's help, Hunt got the doctor into the bed and pulled the covers over him. Maybe they wouldn't miss Mitford for awhile, he hoped.

"Where do they keep the jets?" he asked, pushing the guard towards the door.

"In the entrance cavern."

"This time, I'll walk between and slightly behind you and Mitford, and if we have any difficulty along the way—then it's the end for you. Let's go!"

At the end of the corridor they entered an elevator which the guard said would drop them to the main level. Another elevator would be there to take them to the entrance cavern, the only exit.

"How do they get the rockets out?"

Hunt asked once they were descending in the elevator.

"Through folding doors in the roof."

Suddenly the descending cage came to an abrupt stop. Before Hunt could do anything, an elderly man wearing a tech-uniform walked through a door labeled Level II and into the car. The rest of the way down the man kept casting curious glances at them over his shoulder. As they touched bottom, Hunt decided to hit him over the head with the gun—which he did. When the doors opened, Hunt slid back the maintenance panel and smashed the control relay. Fortunately nobody was yet in sight.

AGES SEEMED to pass as they walked across the immense floor expanse supporting the gleaming rockets. Still no one was in sight except a small group of technicians fueling the furthest rocket. Things were going too good to be true—which was bad, thought Hunt.

But finally they reached the far side and halted in front of a huge vaultlike door.

"That's strange," said the guard. "This is the first time I've seen this door closed."

"Well, open it!" Hunt said savagely.

The guard looked terrified. "I can't! It's operated by remote control from the—"

Splat!

Misty tendrils of tear gas shot up on their right. Another shell crashed in front of them, sending out a dense cloud of whitish vapor.

Quickly Hunt glanced around. High up on the catwalk he could see several men with gas guns; to his left, the techs had already started towards him. He yanked out the gun and finger, and carefully fired. Two of them dropped, and the others scat-

tered like frightened sheep.

Three shells fell in succession. The guard disappeared into one of the clouds. Hunt grabbed Mitford by the arm and started running for cover.

Men were pouring down a stairway next to the ruined elevator. Hunt suddenly realized there was no cover! Still pulling Mitford after him, he dodged behind a scaffolding next to the nearest rocket. The rocket was between them and the direct line of fire of the men on the catwalk. Again he shot into the mob advancing across the floor. He heard Mitford coughing, and turned to see dozens of shells bursting to the right and left of the rocket. Long gaseous streamers, already drifting over, were settling around Mitford's shoulders.

Hunt shouted to him to start climbing, and giving him a boost, followed. The whole floor area around the rocket was a cottony cloud of rising gas, rising faster than they could climb. As they reached the top, both were clawing at their eyes and coughing.

There was a clang and Mitford fell back against him, unconscious. Through watering eyes Hunt saw that Mitford's head had hit the open rocket port. Inside was blackness. With a heave, he managed to thrust Mitford through the port. Then he stumbled in after him, swinging the port shut.

In the darkness a tiny red sign flashed **WARNING! LOCK PORT!** Below it in the dimness he pushed a button labeled "Cockpit Light" and the darkness blazed into radiance. In the center of the port was a wheel stamped "Locking Valve." He turned it and the port screwed counterclockwise until a green sign blinked **SAFE.**

He wondered how safe for how

long. Well, he still had the gun, and when they started coming through the port he could pop them off one by one, saving the last bullet for himself. That way he could tip off Unlimited, if that wave-band business was true.

If there was only some way out of this alive!

WITH A groan, he leaned back and blinked his smarting eyes. He gazed up at what was apparently the ceiling when the rocket was in horizontal flight. A huge fuel dial with needle pointing to full, was the only thing that broke the heavy layer of sponge-rubber padding covering the ceiling and bulkheads. To the right of the bulkhead on which he was lying, a door marked "Space-locker" was the only unpadded surface in the cockpit.

Except for the troubled breathing of Mitford, there was utter silence inside the ship. The fuel gauge glared down at him like an angry eye.

Fuel!

The word suddenly penetrated deep into his awareness. If he could start the motors, the exhaust would burn to a cinder anybody near the ship.

He climbed into one of the control chairs, tangling himself in safety straps and webbing. Not until then did he realize he knew nothing about a spaceship.

The instrument panel was divided into two sections, one labeled "Celestial Navigation," the other "Ship Control." He concentrated on the latter. In the center of the panel a dial resembling an aircraft drift meter was marked "Vertical Tilt Indicator." Below it were several other meters tagged with names he'd never heard of. A gyroscopic on-off switch completed the board. To the right of

his chair, on a small ledge, was a large red button stamped "Igniter." Underneath were fuel mixture controls and a conventional-type throttle.

Suddenly things seemed simple: set the fuel-mix between rich and lean, crack open the throttle and push the button—

He did just that. Nothing happened. Then he discovered the fuel valve on the floor under the seat. Again he punched the button, and nothing happened. He'd overlooked the fuel-pump toggle. He held it in the *on* position and hit the igniter.

There was a soft boom, then a steady roar like wind down a chimney. He inched the throttle forward, deepening the roar. The ship began to quiver. Now let them try to come near!

Suddenly an idea struck him with such force that he was almost afraid to think about it! Insane as it was, in the long run it would be their only chance. He left his chair and dragged Mitford into the other, connected the straps and harness, then climbed back into his own chair and did the same thing.

Resting his hand on the throttle, he wondered if he could make it through the closed doors in the roof, and if he could control the ship once he was through? What else was there to try in his position?

He jammed the throttle full forward.

The roar deepened until it seemed to fill the entire universe. It was all through the ship, inside his body, pounding in his head! He sank back in the cushioned chair. Then deeper and deeper... An immense weight was trying to press his eyeballs into his brain...

There was a splintering crash! And he was shooting up into the

sky with only the blackness ahead.

Slowly the Tilt Indicator began sliding off to the left. He tried correcting it with the control stick. The needle slipped still further to the left. He cut the throttle to half and again furiously manipulated the stick. The ship wouldn't respond! The needle was now almost horizontal!

Suddenly he realized what was wrong. He'd forgotten to turn on the gyroscope!

Too late! The ship was already falling towards earth. Quickly he closed the throttle and waited for the end...then out of the corner of his eye he saw Mitford lift both arms...

THE HEAVY pounding of his heart was the first thing he became aware of. It seemed to be right inside his brain. His eyes hurt so... he couldn't tell whether they were open or closed. Everything was blackness. He reached out his hand. The surface on which he was lying felt wet. He touched his forehead. It was slippery with blood. With shaking hands he managed to tear away a piece of his shirt and tie it around his head. Reeling, he stood up only to fall back to the icy cold floor. But the coldness revived him.

Once more he stood up and felt his way around the room. There seemed to be rubbery garments hanging over the walls. For a moment he thought he was inside a closet of some sort. Then it all came back to him: Before they had crashed, Mitford, out from under the drugs, had hit him over the head with something. But what was he doing back here in a space-locker? Fumbling around for a flashlight inside a cupboard, his hand came in contact with a brace of .38's. He took one out

and decided to shoot holes in one of the walls, letting in sufficient light to find the locker-door catch.

He pressed the trigger. Where light should have appeared, there was suddenly a high screaming hiss!

Fear ran through him more icy than any arctic cold. That hissing meant only one thing—they were out in space! They hadn't crashed after all. Quickly he grabbed the nearest spacesuit his hands came in contact with, and remembering how he'd seen it done by spacemen in the telecasts, scrambled into it, clamping down the fishbowl which automatically turned on the oxygen and heat. Then, somehow, with part of another spacesuit, he managed to get the hole plugged.

Weakly he sat down on the floor and fought to collect his senses. *Out in space with a psychopath at the controls!* A psychopath inimical to him. Otherwise why had Mitford locked him inside here?

It was difficult to think. Blinding flashes of pain kept shooting through his head. He was almost afraid to think what they might mean.

This looked like the end unless he could get out of here and regain control.

ONCE MORE he made a search of the cupboards and shelves, and again found nothing even resembling a flashlight. He leaned wearily against a bulkhead, letting his hands for the first time fall idly to his sides. His right hand came squarely in contact with a cylindrical object clamped to the heavy belt around his waist. New hope flooded through him. He should have felt there in the first place. It was a flashlight.

In a matter of seconds, he found the door outline, then, without mishap, blasted off the lock.

He opened the door just in time to see Mitford, an angry look of fear on his face, whirl out of the control chair and produce a .38 from somewhere. Hunt dived for his legs—there was a shattering crash and the fishbowl disappeared from around his head! Before Mitford could fire again, Hunt hit him squarely in the solar plexus with the butt of his own gun; then, as Mitford doubled up, he clipped him hard on the side of jaw. Mitford collapsed.

He pulled Mitford back into the chair and, this time, strapped him in in such a way that he would be unable to move either arms or legs.

Wearily he sank into the other chair. What to do now? He gazed out the viewport at the alien and unreal-looking stars. They seemed to kindle tiny fires inside his brain. He shut his eyes as he finally realized what was causing the fire-works inside his head. He could almost see the end—maybe in the next second, maybe in the next month. It was there inside his brain, waiting for him. He opened his eyes again to the stars. No use praying to them or anyone now. He wasn't going to be the World Saver after all.

Lost among the stars!

Then far, far to the left he recognized something that looked like the Moon. He turned the ship. It was

the Moon! And the Earth, a shimmering globe of blue, wasn't far from it.

With a nervous laugh, he glanced up at the fuel gauge. It was half-full. He would be able to make it to the Moon! There was a World Council science base near Tycho, and he would land there. This time he wouldn't forget the gyroscope.

Suddenly he was happy. Happier than he had ever been before in his life. *He was out among the stars!* To hell with Cordell and Unlimited! Why not do the right thing for a change, instead of what he was paid to do? He would turn Mitford over to the Council authorities as soon as he landed, and let them smash Unlimited, insuring Earth's safety at the same time.

Head pounding like a trip-hammer, he sat there drinking in the glitter and darkness of the universe, trying to feel satisfied with himself, wondering if he would be mentioned in future histories. He smiled. What difference did it make? He'd only done another job. Even as the thought came to him, a flash of pain more brilliant than the others, darted through his head. It meant he had only a little time left for living.

But the feeling was strong that the Earth wasn't on its last orbit after all.

THE END

SMOKE SCREEN

ATOMIC energy is still a little way off; until then we have to get electrical energy from that age-old source—burning coal. People are using lots of juice these days, and each succeeding year will see an enormous increase in current consumption. This means tens of millions of tons of burning coal. And where coal burns there is almost always smoke.

Things have gotten pretty bad in a lot of cities; so smoky that you can't see where you're going. The electric power plants however have discovered a new chemical,

which when fed to the monstrous boilers, makes the gases burn completely so that there is no smoke at all!

Atomic power won't create a smoke screen, it's true, but the problem of getting rid of radioactive materials is a tough one and nobody has come up with the solution. The government would still like to know what to do with "hot" stuff. When they start dumping radioactives, people want to be far away. Anybody got an old continent he's not using?

—Lee Owen

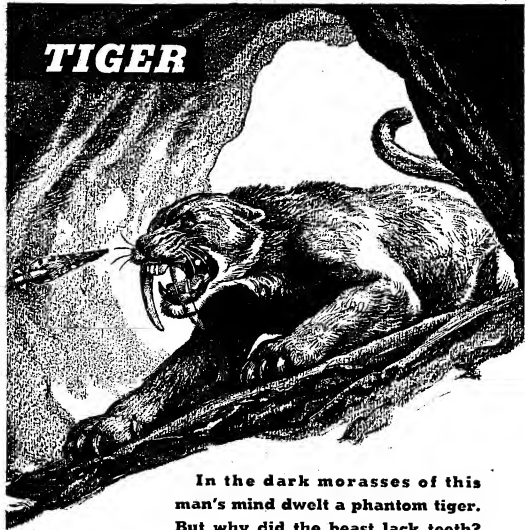
NO TEETH for the

By Paul W. Fairman



Even as he saw the animal prepare to charge, reason told him this was no more than a figment of madness

TIGER



**In the dark morasses of this
man's mind dwelt a phantom tiger.
But why did the beast lack teeth?**

IT WAS horrible, as usual, but doubly so now, because he had thought there was nothing more to fear. He had decided that the terrible visitation had faded into the nothingness from which it sprang, and would haunt him no more. Through untroubled weeks—months—he had been lulled into a sense of false security.

And now he lay panting in his bed, filled again with the terror of it. His

heart was a thundering thing, striving to tear itself from his breast. His teeth were set deep into his lower lip, and the sheets were soaked with perspiration. Water poured from a pail would not have been more effective.

He tipped his feet to the floor and sat for a time, trembling, head bent down against his wet palms. His sob was a shudder of reaction, a twitch of memory. His mind cleared and,

again, he thought of the book.

Sliding into a robe, he moved through dark rooms and snapped on a light. He was in the library, a high ceilinged room housing bank upon bank of richly bound volumes. They were like mute judges staring down at him—condemning him without the formality of a trial.

But the book he sought was not one of these. He found what he had come for in a small safe behind a picture that swung out on hinges. He dropped into a chair under the light and opened it. It was a small volume bound in purple silk. Upon its surface, the word DIARY was inscribed in gold.

He hadn't come to learn of anything new. He was merely going through an old routine. He would read and then he would wonder, as he had done so many times in the past.

First he read—words written in a neat feminine hand, done in purple ink, long long ago:

I took Robby to the zoo today and he was so cute I could have actually eaten him. His big blue eyes and his solemn, pink little face make me so proud of him when people turn and smile.

In ways he is such a strange child. He was impressed with it all, but he showed no great interest until we went into the cat house. There he stopped me in front of the Bengal tiger's cage and refused to budge. He stood silently staring at the great vicious beast as though it were the most fascinating thing in the world.

Tigers make me nervous but when I tried to lead him away he grasped the railing and set his chin and I knew it was no use. He has a chin like his father. Then my little angel mystified me completely. He looked up at me, very seriously, and said, "No teef, Mommy," pointing at the tiger, as he said it.

For the life of me I couldn't understand what he meant; the beast certainly had plenty of teeth. It yawned and showed us a set of the sharpest fangs in the world. But Robby kept insisting, "No teef, Mommy. No teef."

Then he began crying and I took him out of the place and home. He was upset all evening, refusing to eat his supper. I told Henry of the incident and he took Robby on his knees and questioned him.

"What did you mean, Robert, when you said that the tiger had no teeth?" I think Henry used far too serious a tone with a three-year-old child, but Robby seemed to understand. He slid to the floor and brought Henry a picture book that he'd decorated with a crayon, and pointed to a picture of a crouching tiger. But, coming from the tiger's mouth, he'd made two long lines in red—two great teeth extending almost to the tiger's paws.

I put Robby to bed after that, but when I returned to the sitting room, Henry was mulling the incident over in his mind. "Possibly," he said, "Robby has a tiger mixed up with a walrus." He went through the book, but he found nothing in it remotely resembling a walrus.

Henry, I think, attaches too much importance to the incident. I had quite a time getting him ready for the theater....

Now, "Robert Clinton wondered, as he had done so many times before. He ran gentle fingers over the silken surface of the book. His eyes softened. The hand that had written those pages had been dust for many years. The mother who had loved her baby and the father who had wondered about the childishly decorated tiger lay side by side, now, under sweet green grass. But the son lived on.

And the tiger lived on, in ghastly dreams.

Robert Clinton arose and began pacing. As a child of three, he had found something missing on a tiger in the zoo. He had never seen a tiger before, so why had the beast seemed incomplete to him without the two murderous tusks that distinguished the saber tooth tiger of pre-historic times? And why did the tiger in his adult nightmares...

Something must be done. A man

had to sleep. He had to be able to sleep without having his soul torn out of him in the night. Robert Clinton put away his mother's diary and drank black coffee until dawn crept in from the east.

LYLE MONROE was a brilliant and peculiar man. Having been born with a question mark embedded in his brain, he took up psychiatry because it impressed him as a field in which there were more answers than could be found in ten lifetimes. And, because he was personable and had a way with rich dowagers, his practice brought him a lot of patients and a great deal of money.

He sat now, behind his rosewood desk, interviewing a patient who was in a position to pay a tremendous fee. But Monroe wasn't too interested in money. He had plenty of it already. He was sincerely wondering whether or not he could do this man any good. He arose and said,

"Lie here, Mr. Clinton—on this couch. Might as well relax."

Clinton got to his feet a trifle uncertainly and Lyle Monroe gave him an easy smile. "Don't take it too seriously. Just regard anything you don't understand as plain hocus-pocus. We have to put on a bit of a front, you know, to make people think they're getting their money's worth. The women like it."

Monroe's slightly cynical manner was soothing to Robert Clinton's shredded nerves. He stretched out as directed and Monroe turned on a small light set in the ceiling over the couch. "Just keep your eyes on that and don't worry. I'll tell you about it before I try hypnotism. Look at the light or close your eyes if you want to. But don't go to sleep."

Robert Clinton sighed deeply. He liked Monroe. There was a gentle

power in the man; almost a magnetism.

Monroe sat down in an overstuffed chair and stretched out his legs.

"Now," he said, "tell me about those dreams."

"It will all sound childish to you—silly."

"If it does I'll let you know."

Robert Clinton laid an arm across his forehead. "I'm forty-two now, and for ten years they've been plaguing me. Or rather I should say it has been plaguing me. One dream over and over again."

"A dream of a tiger."

"Yes. I seem to be against a wall, although I never see the wall or feel it, but I know I can't go backwards—I can't retreat. I crouch there waiting and I feel a terror that never diminishes by repetition. I've been through it so many times that you'd think I could say to myself, 'It's only a dream. I'll wake up soon and it will be over.' But each time the terror is there. It increases—grows stronger."

"Go on. What happens in the dream?"

"I wait, crouching there. Then I hear footsteps—soft padding sounds and I know that I know what it is—. That doesn't make sense does it?"

"Make it make sense."

"Well, it's—it's that I know it's the tiger moving toward me. Yet I'm surprised when I see the beast."

"I think I follow. You're *knowing* is really the sense of helplessness that come from your inability to awaken; a knowledge that you've got to go through with the thing."

"Then there it is—waiting to spring—a tiger larger than a real earthly beast as we know today. It's as large as a colt, and has two great saber-teeth extending down from its upper jaw. Then I hear a scream from somewhere and for a brief instant I seem

to be in a cave—then the tiger springs and I go down and those two fangs bury themselves in my chest. I can smell a fetid odor of rottenness coming from its maw—”

Robert Clinton balled his fists. He writhed on the couch and beat the air. His voice shrilled. “The fangs—in my chest! I—I—”

Lyle Monroe had switched on the brighter lights. He bent down and gripped his patient’s shoulder.

“Easy—easy. Everything is all right. Nothing to worry about. Drink this.”

He took a glass of liquid from the side table and held it to Robert Clinton’s lips. Clinton drank and looked around the room, wonderingly.

Monroe smiled. “I said I wouldn’t use hypnotism, but it seems that you did it yourself. Better sit here by the desk and collect your wits.”

AFTER A time, Clinton’s breathing became normal. His embarrassment was greatly in evidence. “Made a fool of myself,” he muttered. “Sorry.”

“On the contrary, you revealed something, in two minutes that might have taken me months to unearth.”

Clinton looked up, his eyes desperately hopeful.

“I revealed something?”

“Definitely, but don’t ask me what, because I wouldn’t be able to give you an answer.”

“I—I don’t quite understand.”

Monroe dropped into a chair and sat staring at the tips of his twenty-dollar shoes.

“There’s something wrong with you,” he said, his expression growing dreamy, “and you come to a doctor—a mind doctor—with the idea of paying out good money to get fixed up. On that basis you have a right to expect results. You don’t know what’s wrong with you, or you

wouldn’t have come, and frankly we doctors don’t know either. Just between you and myself—we don’t know what the hell we’re doing half the time.”

Robert Clinton was silent, and Monroe went on:

“In most respects, we’re pioneers—blind men blundering along in the dark. Yet we can’t be blamed too much. We try. God, how we try! But we work with a wonderful and a majestic thing—the human mind. And what do we really know about it—know for sure?”

Monroe leaned forward and pointed a finger. “Look, you go to an M.D. and he checks you over and tells you: ‘Mister, you have inside you an organ known as a liver. We know that because we’ve pulled them out of people and investigated them. Everyone, without exception, has one and it’s a good organ and will do its damndest to stick by you if you’ll only give it half a break. But, Mister, you’ll have to stop doing some of the things you’re doing now, or that liver will turn into a lump harder than a billiard ball and you’re not going to be around when the last doctor takes it out of you and looks at it.’

“See what I mean? Medical men have tangible things to work with. They can prove that certain abuses result in definite disorders. But the human mind...”

Monroe turned the palm of his hand upward and the tone of his voice went down. “I’ve probed the brain for a lot of years, and I’m only sure of one thing—the mind of man, as a creation, forces the belief in God.”

A moment of silence followed, broken by a short laugh from Lyle Monroe. “I should sell tickets for my lectures,” he said, and got to his feet.

"You make it quite clear," Robert Clinton said, "but you mentioned that I had revealed something to you—"

"You showed me that something inside you is vitally amiss. You aren't as fortunate as half the women who troop in here with their silly little fixations. They can be straightened out in ten minutes. What you've done is make me realize how little I know about what I'm trying to do."

"Then you don't feel that you can help me."

"I didn't say that. But I don't want you to get any false impressions from a well furnished office and a high sounding title. We'll dig into you and see what we can find out. But we'll be moving together, like two explorers. I'll be taking you by the hand and leading you down some dark tunnels. I'm familiar with a few of them—I know where some of them lead. But beyond a certain point, I'll be as much in the dark as you. And, in the end, you may have to go on—alone."

Monroe looked into his patient's eyes. "Incidentally—" his voice got light, casual—"I'm planting a thought in your mind right now—or rather I tried to. That may be lousy psychiatry but—"

"What thought?"

"Never mind that now. Be back here tomorrow at one-thirty and we'll get to work."

Robert Clinton pointed a great deal of thought toward Lyle Monroe that night, and was surprised at his feeling of confidence in the man, even though Monroe had seemed not to want confidence. He talked deprecatingly, but he exuded power.

Clinton slept well and awoke refreshed, although with vague memories of the tiger waiting in the darkness—crouching.

THE SMALL light in the ceiling was only a faint brightness

against Clinton's closed eyelids. Monroe's voice was a low, soothing sound; it was a silken probe, uncovering memories buried deep in Clinton's mind.

"You are looking into the cage. Your mother's hand is on your shoulder. You see the tiger for the first time. What is your thought?"

Drowsily the answer came: "It is so small. Keeta should be much larger. And his teeth are gone."

"But you never saw a tiger before."

"Saw Keeta many times. Long teeth—"

Clinton tensed on the couch. "Saw Keeta—felt Keeta!"

"Gently, gently." Monroe's hand moved out. "Open your eyes. Look at the light."

Clinton relaxed. From below in the street came the faint sound of passing traffic. It penetrated Clinton's senses, quieted him.

After a time Monroe's voice came again.

"Be careful," he said, "the tunnel is narrow. Hold my hand tightly."

Clinton's hand flexed into a fist. "Hold tightly. Dark."

And, to Clinton, the tunnel he plodded through was dark, cold and forbidding. The blackness was as thick and heavy as stagnant water. It pulled at his clothing, clutched his throat, held him back. He whimpered; but there was Monroe's voice, quiet, sane, like a light in the darkness. There was the warm feel of Monroe's hand in his own, and Monroe's presence, an anchor to cling to when all else seemed sheer madness.

"Steady—steady. We are not lost. We know these passages."

And, in Clinton's mind, they moved on, down, down, and Clinton thought that they must have advanced to the very bastions of hell. But still they pressed forward.

Now the darkness was thickened to

the point of stifling a man. Nothing to breathe. Pounding lungs. Blood smashing out of prison, through his skin.

Somewhere, in the darkness ahead, a tiger roared.

Clinton screamed, and in his throat he formed a word. "Back! Back!"

Monroe's voice agreed. "Gently. We will go back. You know the way. Remember? Lead me back."

And Clinton drew Monroe up through the black passages, but they never got quite out of them because Clinton lost consciousness and was then lying on a couch, looking at a light with the safe sounds of traffic welling in through the window.

Monroe appeared to be tired—a trifle wan. He dragged at a cigarette and said, "Until today I had half hoped the condition sprang from that first sight of a tiger in the zoo when you were three years old. I've spent five afternoons trying to establish causation somewhere back in your childhood."

Monroe smashed out his cigarette. "But it's no good. It goes back farther than that—much farther."

"It was different today," Clinton said, passing a hand over his wet forehead. "Today I had a dream and I couldn't hear your questions anymore. But you were there—you were in the dream—leading me down a dark passage."

"Yes," Monroe said, getting to his feet. "The mind is full of dark passages. They lead to strange places—some of them."

He jerked himself around, suddenly and stood over Clinton. "We've come to a spot, now," he said, "where it's up to you. You've got to make a decision. Do you want to go on? Or do you want to call it quits and walk out of here for good?"

"I don't quite understand you."

"No. You wouldn't. But I'll try and explain. We've gone quite a distance together—you and I—a long way back into the darkness of your mind. But we haven't found anything. All we've established is the fact that your problem lies beyond our farthest footstep. Somewhere back in there it awaits conquering, and you—and you alone—will have to go in and meet it—grapple with it. I can't go with you."

Clinton's head ached, dully. "If I go on alone—what will happen?"

"It amounts to this: You'll fight your battle and win—or you won't come out."

Clinton frowned. "That's absurd. You're speaking of death. A dream can't kill you."

"Perhaps I'm not referring to death. I may be alluding to insanity. Incurable mental chaos. But don't be too sure that a dream can't kill you. Anything that can affect physical processes as yours have been affected—can kill. As I said, the decision must be yours. I can promise nothing."

Lyle Monroe moved to the window and stood looking out. He flipped his cigarette at a passing pigeon, turned back and sat down. He stared at Robert Clinton, past him, through the wall.

"Okay," Clinton said. "We'll play it out."

"Tomorrow at two," Monroe said. He took a few capsules from a drawer, slipped them into an envelope and pushed them toward Clinton.

"Every three hours," he said.

"I don't think I'll have much trouble sleeping tonight."

"That's what we don't want. Those are to keep you awake. And nothing to eat."

Clinton spent the night with his mother's diary.

HE WAS surprised at his feeling of freshness when he again stood in Monroe's office at two the following day. There were three of them now. A white-uniformed nurse had been added. She was a tall dark-eyed girl, who was busy arranging a few bright medical instruments on a tray.

Monroe looked alert and fresh, in a perfectly fitting two-hundred-dollar suit.

Clinton stared at the instruments. "Are we going to cut our way in?" he asked, trying to make his voice sound light.

Monroe waved a negligent hand. "Pay no attention. Just trying to make the place look professional. This is Miss Baylor. I brought her in for decoration. If we get bored she'll strip down and do a dance."

The softness of the couch was welcome to Clinton's body. Lying there he realized how tired he was. His eyes closed and the tiny ceiling light was oddly restful. He looked up at Monroe, standing over him.

"This is—it?"

"This is it," Monroe repeated softly.

There was the soothing drug of Monroe's voice, and his firm cool hand. Clinton held tightly to the hand.

Now the darkness, the chill, the desolation. The stumbling now, down, down, down, and the tangible pillar of Monroe's strength moving beside him. Their path led ever forward, against an invisible wall that was sensed rather than seen. A wall that kept fading backward as they pressed into it.

"Where—where?"

And Monroe's voice came through the darkness, close by Clinton's side: "Fight the fear—push hard against it. You are not in a strange place. You lived here once. Long ago it

was your home and you weren't afraid then. It hasn't changed. This is all dark because you, yourself, were the light. You illuminated your own existence. As you outgrew these realms and moved upward, you left only darkness. Around you, here, lie all the things that are *you*. Don't fear them."

Clinton trembled. They advanced.

The darkness thickened to the consistency of muddy water. There was great heat and at times it seemed to Clinton that they were not walking. Rather they floated against a current, driven forward by the pressure of Monroe's hand.

"We must turn back," Clinton whimpered.

"Forward. Resist the fear."

Then, after seeming ages, Clinton realized that Monroe was no longer with him. He was alone, standing as on the edge of a precipice he could not see, in a land he did not know.

He cried out and the voice came again.

"You must go on alone. You must eat of your own strength. Live by your own will to live, or fall by your own weakness. Go forward. Fight the fear."

The voice faded into a far-away dreaming sound, and was gone.

Clinton turned in panic. He was alone. He strove to retreat, and then he knew that there was no retreat. The wall that had grown up behind him was a brooding, tangible thing: the only solid substance in this black world of madness.

He fled forward, in panic, and then he was falling—tumbling end over end—into nothing.

But, as he fell, the darkness cleared and was gone. He kept screaming, "Monroe! Monroe!" and the sound of his own voice echoed from the vales and summits of a world he could now see and feel and hear.

THE SCENE was vaguely indicative of rough-hewn newness; there was an adolescent gauntness in the brown-gray panorama as it spread below him into a narrow-floored valley and reared away into jagged peaks on the other side. The far side was similar to the section up which he was climbing now. It also had dangerous footings like the one from which he had just slipped. He looked up from the ledge upon which he lay. He rubbed his knee and laughed, and high in the blue sky a lemon-yellow sun grinned back.

He glanced quickly downward into the valley toward the village far below. But there was nothing strange to him at sight of the tiny huddled thatches or the valley itself or the peaks. Nothing strange because he had lived here all his life. This was the only world he knew.

There was a brown hand upon his forehead. He pushed it roughly away and got to his feet, avoiding Mala's jet black eyes. She stood close to him, her slim naked brown body touching his own. He pushed her and scowled, glad the while that no one had been near enough to see his fall.

He knew that he should hit Mala—hit her with his hard hand. She should not have done what she did. When he fell she should have turned away until he was again on his feet and climbing. Then she should have followed meekly behind him.

But Mala wasn't like that, and there seemed no way to teach her. While he climbed steadily, she bounced all around him—above and below—like a sure-footed mountain goat. Brown skin, white teeth, heavy black hair. She broke all the rules and laughed innocently while she did it. Somehow it didn't seem right—hitting Mala.

He picked up his short-spear and set himself again for the climb, but

Mala stood eyeing him uncertainly. She spoke and her voice was low, musical.

"Cree—when you fell you— Who is Mon-roe?"

"Monroe?"

"You said it when you fell. You said it more than once. There is no Mon-roe in the village."

"Monroe." Cree pondered. Was it even a word?

Suddenly Mala's eyes smouldered—flamed. "Is that someone in the valley. Someone I don't know? A girl?"

Cree's laugh boiled up. "Yes, a girl, brown one. A smooth white girl who stays out of the sun and has a soft body. Not a wild man-girl who climbs mountains without her robe—shamelessly naked."

Mala screamed and jerked at Cree's short-spear. And Cree fought with her to retain it because he knew she'd kill him, now, if she could. Cree tossed the spear out of reach. Then he got his arms around Mala and held her while she raged. Her teeth sank into his brown hide. He squalled and hit her with a flat palm. She went down, curled herself into a ball and sobbed.

Cree looked at her, vaguely perturbed. He picked up the spear and growled, "Enough of this. You whine like a new baby before it's wiped off. Get up! You want the yellow flowers, don't you?"

She was up instantly. The yellow flowers did it. In this rugged land there was little enough of beauty. Blossoms were rare, but in some of the damp caves, high on the plateau, tiny blooms gave out a sweetness of smell, that made the getting worth great risk—especially to women.

MALA WAS off again, floating up the rock like a warm breeze. Cree scowled and followed her. He moved

steadily, thinking his thoughts. The men of the village would laugh at him if they knew he was making this climb for a few silly yellow flowers. Men didn't do such things. If women asked for blossoms they got a kick and were told to get about skinning the bear their man had brought home. While they did this, the men gathered around and told of their prowess with the spear and the club. That was as it should be, of course. That was life as it was lived during the days when the survival of man on earth was at best an uncertain thing.

Cree climbed on. He frowned. Those caves above were dangerous places. They were where men went in groups, armed to the teeth, searching for Keeta, after Keeta had raided the village and dragged away the body of a wife or a child or a husband. Keeta ruled the caves and even when the men climbed after him, each hoped in his own heart that the great saber-tooth wouldn't be found. They had to seek him out, to save face, but a man's private thoughts were his own.

Cree wondered why he had been so fool-hardy. But his wondering was a gesture only. He knew why he was climbing. It was pleasant indeed, lying on the damp cave-floor, with Mala weaving yellow blossoms in his hair. He'd done it before and he wanted to do it again. Mala would hold the flowers in her arms and croon to them. Then her brown body would rub his own, awakening strange sensations.

Some day he would fight for Mala, in the square before the village, with any man who would risk battle to have her. And she would go to the winner but Cree knew that he had been the first to feel the hot touch of her.

Above him, Mala leaned over the

sharp edge of the plateau and dropped a pebble. It hit Cree's shoulder, he looked up, and she flashed white teeth at him. He crawled over the edge and reached for her but she was flying across the smooth ground toward the rock buttresses that housed the caves. She selected the large center cave, and when Cree went inside, he found her kneeling by the small spring, her face buried in the pale, yellow flowers.

He bent over and slapped her, smartly, upon the posterior. That was for the pebble she'd thrown. But Mala didn't seem to feel it. She tore a great handful of the flowers up from their roots, rolled over on her back and rubbed them in her face. Her expression was one of odd ecstasy. The perfume was a drug.

Cree dropped down and lay beside her. The perfume of the flowers and the perfume of Mala was pleasant in his nostrils and he did a very unmanly thing. He plucked a flower and pushed it into her raven hair. She smiled and turned as shy as a vagrant breath of summer. Her shyness caused a strange pumping in his chest.

Mala stretched a brown hand out and touched Cree's arm.

"Strong," she murmured. "You are the strongest man in the valley. You could lift the mountain and move it away." Her arm stretched upward toward a great boulder on a ledge above them. "You could lift even that great stone."

She laughed and ground a yellow flower between her white teeth. She was breathing heavily.

And the first roar of Keeta was a crash of thunder, rending the hot silence.

HE CROUCHED in the doorway, leaving no room for escape. Half inside the cave and half out, he

crouched down on his belly, the tips of his great tusks scraping the soft earth. Four sinewy legs, like young trees, were drawn under him. He roared again.

Languor was washed away in an instant. They were on their feet. Action became merely reaction. As Cree bent down toward the short-spear—Keeta lunged, and Mala took the full brunt of the charge.

Mala's scream was high and thin as she went down. Blood, welling from her throat stopped the scream, and Keeta, sensing the kill, turned on Cree before he could move. Then Cree was down under the great weight of the cat. The fangs pressed close and horrible stench came from Keeta's throat.

But Cree had gotten his hand upon the short-spear. His jab was a puny, back-handed motion, but it touched Keeta in his sensitive under belly. The tiger whirled and lashed at the sting, and Cree was no longer weighted down. He fled the cave, urged on by the primitive law.

The primitive instinct was simple and to the point: Survival. Fight, but only when cornered. Of the three basic emotions—love, hunger, and fear—fear was by all odds the strongest. Get away! Keep your skin whole. Survive!

So Cree bolted from the cave, but, even above the fear, was a strange thought—an alien thought crowding his mind. It was as if all this had happened before—as if the incident were free of time and place—and as some great consequence hinged upon it.

He stopped running, laying a hand across his eyes. Something pulled at him and that queer, meaningless word came into his mind. Mon-roce, mon-roce. Somewhere, he had heard it before—somehow he knew its meaning.

Monroe was a new law; a law that said there were things more important than living; that living was a small thing if it had to be done in shame and in weakness. And he knew that he had to go back and stand against Keeta. Whatever the consequences—whatever the results. That was what monroe meant. Keeta had killed Mala. Therefore he had to face the tiger.

He went back swiftly, though silently, sharply alive, and again the strange feeling came. The feeling formed a thought in his brain:

This is no dream!

He wondered at it. No dream? What was a dream?

Keeta squatted at the feast. His jaw had closed over Mala's brown thigh and mangled the bones therein. The sound stirred rage in Cree's heart and he bounded to the circular ledge upon which was posed the great rock. He moved as a shadow, but Keeta heard, crouched and snarled.

As Cree lifted the boulder, high over his head, Keeta sprang, jaws agape. Live meat awaited him on the ledge.

Cree pushed the boulder outward. He dropped it, and Keeta's scream could have been heard down in the valley. Cree teetered on the ledge, flailing his arms. Below, on the cavern floor, Keta was only half a tiger. The boulder lay across his middle, crushing it into the soft earth. His hindquarters were dead, inert, but his head, shoulders, and fore-claws were a death trap—a death trap into which Cree fell headlong.

Cree hit the soft earth. A great paw dropped over his legs, pinning him. Keeta's great jaws ground at his body. The two saber-tusks went deep.

NOW THERE was only the pain—
—the agony. There was no flesh,

no world—no time nor space. Cree had no substance, yet the sabers were knives heated in some devil-cauldron for a thousand years. They burned and their burning became a bright ball of flame, and the thought came again. The mon-roe. It was telling him:

The agony and the torture are *you*. They are all that is left. Hold on to them as you would hold to your destiny. When they fade, *you* fade. When they go, *you* are gone forever. Nourish the pain in your consciousness. Make love to the pain as you would make love to Mala.

Time moved again, and it seemed that Cree wrestled, for untold eons, with the agony of his being; folded the torture to the bosom he didn't possess; held agony in the mind he didn't have.

Then it began to fade away. It gentled into a mild, half forgotten nightmare. There was no more pain. Only the voice saying: Hold on. Hold on.

Hold on to what? He was nothing and there was no pain. How could nothing hold on to nothing.

A single word—spoken—pierced his unconsciousness:

"Hypodermic!"

A new pain—sharp—silvery.

Nothing.

ROBERT CLINTON opened his eyes and saw Lyle Monroe bending over him. Monroe's face was gray. His mouth was tight, but now, relief flooded over him.

"That was a near thing, my friend,"

Monroe muttered. He took a deep breath and went over and got a cigarette. He brought one for the dark haired nurse. She looked down at Clinton and smiled ruefully, rubbing her hip.

"I was sitting on your legs but you got in a couple of kicks anyway. You can kick, Mr. Clinton."

Monroe was smiling too, but weakly. "And don't try and claim those two marks on your chest are from a tiger's fangs. They're the marks of my fists, holding you down."

Somewhat later, Clinton sat across the desk from Monroe, dragging on a cigarette himself.

"But it was all so damned real! Tell me—yes or no—was it merely a dream?"

Monroe's eyes grew vague.

"Who am I, or who is any man, to answer that? Who can truly say where dreams end and where realities begin? Who is anyone to say that our high-noon isn't our greatest dream of all."

His words stopped, but Clinton remained silent, and he went on:

"Let's leave it at this. Your tiger was in your mind—somewhere in it's forgotten depth, and you went back into those depths and defeated it. You proved yourself the stronger. Can you ask for more?"

Clinton shook his head. "I'll need one more jolt to make me completely normal. Something big, like a bill. Send me a bill big enough to knock my hat off."

"Don't worry," Monroe answered, smiling. "I will."

IN THE MARCH ISSUE . . .

THE ULTIMATE PERIL

BY ROBERT ABERNATHY

A Smashing Novel By A Sensational New Writer!

SPIDERS OF SATURN

By V. E. Thiessen

HERE THE surface of the planet was bluish gray and vapourous, too heavy to be called a liquid. On, nearer the Southern Pole, the bluish gray turned more sombre in hue.

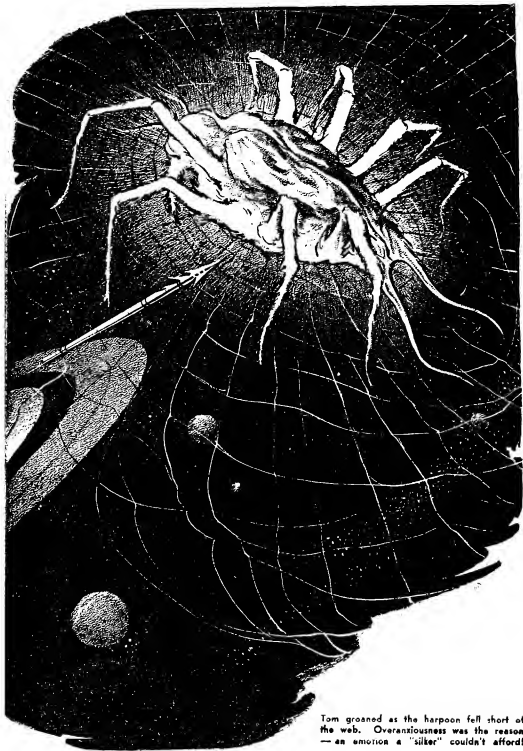
The web came drifting through the thin surface of Saturn, its iridescence gleaming pallidly against the blue gray background. It was a heavy web, its strands comparable to one inch rope, knobbed, sticky strands.

Tom Lund got one glimpse of the spider, man size, hunched monkey-like in the center of the web as it drifted past.

It roused him from his reverie, shocking him from memory to action. He touched the harpoon gun and the harpoon arched in a high, mortar-like parabola, its thin plastic and steel cable trailing, like some tenuous strand that would not quite let it go free.



Deadlier than the spiders' poison was the hatred between these two brothers because of a girl



Tom groaned as the harpoon fell short of the web. Overanxiousness was the reason — an emotion a "silkier" couldn't afford!

Standing there, waiting for the harpoon to fall across the drifting web, Tom checked his equipment. Space suit, ready and donned, to protect against the heat and rays emitted by the radio active portions of the surface. Hand rocket, to propel himself as needed in space till he should return again to the lock of the Huntress. Heat pistol to cut the silk of the spider from its attachment to the web, and of course, a flare pistol to frighten the spider.

He was ready. He stood, watching the harpoon fall, and knew he had been too long in reverie, and fired too late. It fell, its thread-like tie to the ship still retaining the hint of the harpoon's parabolic path, dropping where the web had already passed.

The web turned on edge, swirled, and was gone, disappearing in the blue gray surface. Tom's last glimpse of it revealed the red eyes of the spider gleaming wickedly through the murk.

He said to himself, "You've got to get your mind off Marty and get to work. Your hold is only half full of silk." Even now the great rings of the planet eclipsed this hunting spot morning and evening, leaving only midday to seek the crimson silk that was spun by the spiders of Saturn. In a few more days the eclipse would be entire, and then he would move on.

A woman's voice lilted through the Huntress. "Tom—! Tom Lund!"

Tom stepped to the nose of the ship, and looked in the visiplat. He smiled, for the sight of her always made him smile. "Hello, Barbara."

The image in the plate said, "Open your lock, I'm coming over."

MOMENTS later she stood on the floor of the Huntress stripping the helmet from her space suit. She

flashed a quick smile at him, and said, "I got a call from Martin today."

He stood, immobile, thoughts ticking through his mind. "You heard from Marty?"

"Yes, he's coming here."

Her presence always stirred something deep inside him. He had loved her even before Marty had chosen her to make love to. Her eyes were wide and gray, astonishingly clear and direct. There was the hint of a curl in her hair, not enough to close a ringlet anywhere on her head, yet enough to lend softness to her face. Now, even though flushed by the trip from her ship to the HUNTRESS, her face revealed its essential pattern of serenity.

Tom said, "Take off your space suit and let's talk about it."

She stripped off the suit, revealing a slim figure. "He should be here tomorrow."

"When are you to be married?"

"We haven't settled that."

"Isn't that why he's coming here?"

"Perhaps he wants to see you too, Tom."

He looked at her. He thought, *The young fool. Doesn't he know what he's getting. He's hurting her. I'll have to stop that.*

Another web showed briefly through the transparent viewport of the HUNTRESS. It was gone before Tom could reach the trigger of the harpoon gun.

Beside him, Barbara laid a slim hand on his arm. "I'm worried about you, Tom."

"Worried? Why?"

"You're a fool to do this alone. One of these days you're going to touch a web."

He laughed shortly. "What would that matter?"

She said softly, "If you won't think of yourself, think of Marty."

"You are right of course. Who would look after Marty?"

She dropped her hand from his arm. She said hotly, "Will you never change? Marty is a man now. He doesn't need to be taken care of. He doesn't need you to make his plans and his decisions for him. He's a man, Tom. Will you never learn that?" Her voice softened. "I didn't mean that. I meant—well, he's fond of you, Tom."

Tom Lund said, "Sure, Barbara, that's all right."

BUT AFTER she was gone he found hunting difficult. He missed another cast in his abstraction before the shadow of the Saturnian rings lay athwart the sun, telling him that this day was over, and with the passing of the sun the little moons leaped into sight, four of them almost full, and two crescent-like, angled crazily in the sky, while the other two were not to be seen, hiding somewhere behind the mother planet.

He thought of Marty as he sat watching the crazy moons, and wondered if this last year of school had taken some of the wildness out of him.

He began to move about the HUNTRESS, checking equipment, checking preparations against the needs of the day to follow.

He thought once, Maybe I haven't been good for Marty. Maybe there is something in me that brings the rebellion out. Their parents had died to young, saddling Tom with the responsibility for his younger brother at a time when he should have been carefree and irresponsible himself.

The fuel tanks were his first regard in checking equipment. He eyed them carefully, checking their content against calculations and a set of graphs. This was critical, the

fuel supply. Once the season had begun it was too far, and too time-consuming to rocket back to Terra or Mars for fuel, and there was a constant drain on the fuel to run the repulsors, that kept him hovering above the drifts where the spiders passed. There must be fuel, too, for searching out new drifts when the old played out; or when, as now, the great Saturnian rings threw shadows across the hunting grounds at one hemisphere of the planet. These shadows would last years.

Tom grunted with satisfaction. If he had luck, even though he must move to the northern half of the planet, he would have the fuel to stay till his hold was filled.

Next he stripped the space suit from his body, handling its not too fragile construction with an unreasonable gentleness. This suit was his life. If the joints were to stick, not giving him freedom of action with the propelling pistol, and he touched one of the webs, that would end hunting for him forever. He checked the joints now, lubricating them until they were frictionless in their ease of motion. He hung the suit up and began to strip the harpoon gun.

The visiplat in the Huntress again sprang to life, this time a deep male voice calling, "Tom!"

HE SLID the parts of the harpoon gun beside the breech and crossed the ship. The face of a man filled the plate, an older man than Tom, with a big square face, and hair that was turning gray. There was vigor in the voice, though, and vigor in the face as he spoke. This was Johnathan Ellis, another "silker", Barbara's father. He said, "Tom, I tried the **BABY** myself. She's a honey. I covered every inch of a hundred square miles, and used

hardly any fuel."

"Sounds good to me."

"I hear Marty's coming tomorrow. You'll want the little ship when he gets here?"

"Sure."

"Give me a call when you need her, and thanks again for the loan." The big man's face grew more solemn, "About Marty, Tom."

"Yes?"

"Quit playing God to that boy when he comes home, Tom. He's a good boy, and if you let him stand alone he'll be better."

Tom said grimly, "I guess that's my business."

Johnathan said, "Sure, Tom, but you know how I feel about you boys. But if you push him too far, one of these days Marty is going to defy you. I wouldn't want that to happen, ever."

It was late morning, next day, almost time for the sun to make its appearance at the beginning of the short arc above the Saturnian rings, when Tom heard the rattle and scrape of a space suit against the lock.

This is it, he thought. This must be Marty.

A space-suited figure came out of the lock into the Huntress, stripping its helmet as it came. Ice-blue eyes gazed eagerly from beneath tow colored hair.

Tom said, "Marty, boy," and held out his hand.

The figure brushed by the hand, and seized him, locking their two space-suited figures in cumbrous embrace. "Tom, you old space hound," the towhead said, "How in ether are you?"

It was curious, Tom thought, that the sight of one's brother should bring so much warmth. It was a new thought, too, this thought of his brother as comrade instead of child,

brought on no doubt by the new solidness that lay in the towhead's body, the new confidence in the gaze of his ice-blue eyes. It was a curiously comforting thought.

Marty looked around. "Looks the same," he said. He crossed to the harpoon gun and laid an affectionate hand on her breech. He said, "Emily still spitting it out, huh?"

"Yes."

"How about letting me try her?"

Tom said warmly, "That's a deal. Stand by, the sun is almost up. The first web is yours."

THE THIN edge of the sun leaped over the high curve of horizon, and the blue grey swirl beneath the hovering Huntress began to take on shape and texture.

One faint thin strand of web showed momentarily, far away, and Marty swung the gun up and arced the harpoon into the sky.

Watching, Tom Lund said, "You haven't changed much, Marty. You still like the thin chance, the odds-against-you gamble. You'll never hit it."

The trail of the cable through the murk continued, bearing out his words. Marty smiled ruefully. "All right," he agreed. "I'll wait for a good shot."

Tom Lund said, "That's the way to get silk." Then, "Have you seen Barbara?"

"I stopped by before I came here."

"Good. When are you two getting married?"

Marty squinted through the murk. "I'm not sure we are. I'm not sure I'm ready to settle down yet."

"Have you discussed that with Barbara?"

"Well—No."

Tom said harshly, "You'll play fair with that girl or I'll break your neck."

Marty looked at Tom, little pin-points of light beginning to show through the blue of his eyes. He said quietly, "I guess that's my business."

This was a new Marty. Somewhere in the last year he had learned control of himself, yet Tom knew he was angry, that the rashness was hot within him.

Behind Marty, in the transparent nose, something flashed briefly. Tom yelled, "The web, Marty, the web!"

Marty whirled, catching sight of the drifting web. He aimed quickly, yet this time with care, and let the harpoon go.

It was a hit. The hooks of the harpoon tangled in the web, arresting the drift through the surface murk, and stretching the light cable out from the HUNTRESS. They saw the spider run out, monkey-like, a few feet along the cable to see what it was, his red eyes gleaming balefully at his lack of prey.

Marty clutched at Tom's arm, "Let me go," he begged, "let me go after him."

Tom said, "No. It's dangerous. You can cover me, in case I slip and touch the web. If that happens, shoot straight and quick at the spider."

Marty flared hotly, "I can take care of myself. You've got to stop protecting me sometime."

Tom turned to the space lock, leaving his brother seething behind. He closed the inner door of the lock, and opened the outer, projecting himself into space with a few blasts of the hand rocket. Once out in space, he looked for the spider.

IT WAS to his right, a big one, large as Tom, crouched in the center of its web. Tom was not sure it had seen him, and he touched a tiny blast of the rocket to send him slowly toward it, and adjusted the repulsor beams of his suit, for he was

falling gradually toward the planet. He came in then, directly toward the spider, sidling in toward it, the flare pistol extended. The spider had seen him now, and he touched the flare pistol to project a ball of glaring light.

The spider ran back to the very edge of his web to peer balefully at this new development.

Tom was coming in now, firing the flare pistol again and again. The flame was too much for the spider, and it leaped away from the web, its heavier body ducking down toward the center of the planet, far down, away from these menacing flares. From the web, down through the murk stretched the spider's means of return, a crimson, gossamer strand unreeling as he dropped.

Tom came in cautiously. At the last moment, he ducked under the web, and working swiftly, exchanged the flare pistol for a heat gun at his belt. He adjusted it to the hottest beam, and with his left hand swept the beam across the crimson strand, severing it from the attachment to the web, and cauterizing it before the severed end could send touch impulses to the nervous system of the web. With his right hand he seized the drifting end of the crimson strand, and thrust the heat gun back in his belt. Now he needed his hand rocket to return to his ship.

He blasted carefully away from the web. One touch of that web, and it would close around him, its sensitive nervous system as reactive to touch as the fly catcher plants, and far more swift. At the same time that the web enmeshed him a message would be sent along the gossamer strand to the spider, and the spider would be flashing back, to send poison into the helpless prey. It might take some moments to penetrate the space suit, but it could be done.

That had been proven, to the sorrow of many a "silker's" family.

Tom Lund was back to the Huntress now, tying the strand to the winch outside the viewport on the starboard bow. He was through now, coming inside the lock as the spider came back from the murk, rolling up the crimson gossamer inside itself as it came.

Inside the Huntress, Tom touched a switch, and the winch began to turn, whirling up the pencil size crimson silk onto the reel. The spider was at the winch now, biting at the reel viciously, but it turned on unmin ding, pulling the silk in a swirling ribbon from the spider's body, winding it tightly. In a few swift moments it was done, the spider was stripped of his silk. When that happened, Tom, watching in the viewport, touched the reverse rockets, and the Huntress blasted away, inertia sliding the spider off, to fall through the murk and start its life again, to spin a new web, and renew the silk inside its body.

Their quarrel forgotten, Marty Lund said, "Beautiful work, Tom. He had a lot of silk too."

Tom turned, to meet the approving blue eyes. He smiled, "Thanks, Marty."

THERE WERE, it seemed, to be no more webs that day. They watched till the sun rested on the edge of the ring, ready to sink, and no more of the iridescent webs came drifting by.

Marty said, "Two hours of sunlight. You'll have to move north and find a new drift."

Tom Lund drew the curtains across the transparant viewport. The day was over. He began to move about the ship in his routine, readying things for the day to follow. When Marty came to help he said,

"Never mind. I can do everything myself. Better clean up and go see Barbara."

Marty said, "I wasn't planning to go over tonight."

Tom whirled, "It's been hard enough on that girl, waiting for you, with no one but me to have fun with. You know what most of these silkers are like. A girl isn't safe with a lot of them. Seems to me you owe her some good times."

Marty said, "Same old Tom. Figuring out who owes who what, and what they ought to do about it."

Yet Tom could see he was angry and this new cold controlled rage was harder to combat than the old flaring temper.

The sound of rocket jets, and the voice of Johnathan Ellis from the visiplat broke between them, easing the tension in the room.

"I'm coming over!"

A few moments later the big man was in the HUNTRESS stripping his space suit. He said, "I brought the little ship back for Marty."

The brothers looked at each other. Johnathan Ellis said, sharply, "Haven't you told him?"

Marty was stepping closer, springs in his step, flares in his eyes. "Told me what?"

Tom said wearily, "I bought another space ship, a tiny reconnaissance ship, to save fuel. I figured you could use it to search out new drifts while I worked the old ones."

Marty's voice was dangerously low, "What did you buy it with?"

"I drew our savings for the down payment, and gave paper for the rest."

Marty said, danger still in his voice, "What about me? What if I don't care for this business of silking? What if I want my share of the money?"

Tom said, "You'll stay and help

with the silking."

Marty said bitterly, "What else can I do till the note is paid? Damn you, Tom!"

"Don't take it so, Marty. The money belonged to both of us, you know that, even the part I made silking while you were in school. But I figured you'd want to help me here, for a year or so, at least."

Marty said in soft and bitter tones, "You would!" and sat down.

Johnathan Ellis let out a long breath of relief. The crisis had passed, but the tension still lay in the room, a sharp atmosphere of strain. He said, softly, "I left a little fuel in the Baby to pay for the use of her."

"You didn't have to do that."

"It was worth it, it saved more fuel than I left in it. I better go now." Jonathan Ellis donned his space suit, glad to leave this atmosphere of bitterness. In the space lock he shook his head sorrowfully, before he projected himself out toward his own ship.

In the Huntress Marty said, grimly, "We might as well take a look at this ship you've sold me into bondage for." He got up, "Come on, let's go see her."

INSIDE THE Baby, Marty said interestedly, most of the animosity lost in admiration, "She'll sit piggy back on the big ship, won't she, and tie in to the big fuel supply for refueling?"

From the fuel gauge, Tom Lund grunted, "Yeah," and then explosively, "Johnathan left a little fuel in her, huh! The tank is half full. That's enough fuel to take Baby to Terra." He snorted in disapproval of such generosity.

Marty said, "Come on, Tom, let's piggy back her. Let me try her."

At the controls, Marty dropped

her, feather light, on the locking mount provided on the back of the HUNTRESS. He said then, "She's a little honey, Tom." Then half apologetically, "I don't mind helping you silk, Tom. It's just that I'd like to decide something for myself once in a while."

Tom said, "Sure, boy. I should have asked you about buying her, but it was take her then, or lose her, so I went ahead and took her."

They left the BABY to return to the HUNTRESS. Inside Marty said, "I have some wire tapes of the astronomy trips we took last year. What do you say we go show them to Barbara and her folks?"

"Go ahead. You don't need me."

Marty grinned at him, "Oaf," he said affectionately. He went to the visiplat and engaged Barbara in conversation. A moment later he turned, "Tom, Barbara wants to talk to you."

Looking at her image in the visiplat, Tom Lund forgot his troubles and smiled.

She said, "Tom Lund, you come on over here with Marty, or I'll never speak to you again."

He said sheepishly, "Sure, Barbara, if you both want me."

She said, laughing at him, "We'll always want you. Don't be long now."

ONCE THE Huntress was prepared for the next day, and they had cleaned themselves up, Tom and Marty joined the Ellis family aboard their ship. They were an unusual family, cultured and well educated, in this dangerous profession that attracted mostly riffraff. Besides Barbara, there were two sons, big healthy fearless sons.

Marty drew spools of wire from his pocket. "Where's the projector?"

"Here." Barbara showed him.

He began to thread the wire into

the projector. Written into the structure of these wires, were both voice and image, to be stripped and thrown as a talking three-dimensional picture, as the wire moved slowly through the scanner. They saw travelogues of the planets, mixed with some astronomical science, and now and then some member of the class would appear, gazing at the scenes, or doing something in connection with the pictures.

As Tom watched, the temper began to surge hotly in his blood. Now and then a picture of Marty flashed, Marty and a girl. She must have been one of the class, but she was always close to him. Now, they were laughing at each other, Marty's arm around her.

Tom knew he was wrong. He should wait—should control himself, but he felt his legs pushing himself erect. He heard his voice, hot and uncontrollable as a blast from his heat gun saying, "You come on home, Marty. I've got something to say to you." He wheeled then, trying to retain some control of himself, donned his space suit, and projected himself out of the lock.

Aboard the Huntress he threw himself, fully dressed, across the bunk to await Marty's coming. After a long time he realized that Marty wasn't coming at all.

Hours later, he heard a soft, faint sound, and opened his eyes to see Marty softly moving his things out of the ship. He got up, moved to the transparent viewport. Marty was putting the things in the Baby. Tom knew then what had happened. Marty was quitting. He was taking the Baby, and quitting, to go back to Terra.

Tom groped for his heat gun. By God, he'd stop that. He had the gun in his hand, and was reaching for the space suit on its hook when the truth

struck him, when the meaning of what he had seen in Marty's eyes drove home.

Gun or not, he knew Marty would defy him. He would defy him now, forever.

Out the transparent plate he saw Marty blasting away in his space suit, leaving the little ship still sitting. Tom thought bitterly, Going to say good-bye to Barbara, no doubt.

His rage flamed red again as he thought of her. He got up and went to the control board. The thought struck him then, with all the impact of a blow. *The tanks of the Baby were only half full!* There was perhaps enough fuel to make the trip to Terra, perhaps not. It would serve Marty right if he ran out of fuel, and was stranded in space. He might learn then, if he didn't die first.

And the young, impetuous fool wouldn't check his fuel before starting the trip either, and once gone, if he was a little short, he would be too proud to come back.

Tom thought hotly, I could make it work. I could drain more of the fuel from the tank till I was sure he could not make it. And then, once he was gone, I might help Barbara forget him.

Outside the viewport the little moons seemed to dance in pale glee, a macabre wavering that added to the swirling of Tom's mind. For a time he watched the little moons, till they quieted in their apparent giddiness, and when he rose his mind was crystal clear and hard. He moved swiftly to the fuel controls and began to pump fuel between the ships.

When he was done, he went back to his bed and waited. A half hour later, he heard the roar of rockets, and he knew the Baby had leaped from her piggy-back mounting into space.

He turned on his bed then, hearing

the faint sounds as she blasted into the distance, and once the sound was entirely gone, he closed his eyes and after a long time fell asleep.

IT WAS late the next morning when he finally roused, and went to get his breakfast. Even his coffee was bitter, and seemed to reflect the feeling that lay so heavy inside him.

He got up, and began to ready himself for the approaching sunrise. This would be his last day of hunting. He knew that. After his action last night, there was but one thing to do. He would go back to Terra. He could not move north to the new location now.

He wondered if there were any chance of catching Marty, yet even as he reflected he knew it was hopeless, for the speed of the tiny craft was far above his own, and the chance of being able to locate it in space, even could he catch it, was infinitely small.

HE HAD no luck that day. The blue gray swirls passed endlessly under his ship, but there were no spiders, no webs, no silk.

It is, he thought, a judgement against me for being angry with my brother. The very swirls themselves seemed to say, "What have you done? Your dream is dead. Now you'll never ride the drifts with your brother. Never!—Never—! Never—!"

He closed his eyes against the accusing swirls, and drew the curtain across the viewport. This ended it. He took off his space suit and hung it up.

There was a tiny bump, as something struck the top of the Huntress. The heart of Tom Lund leaped. *The Baby! That had been the shock of the Baby landing!*

The lock opened, and a space-

suit figure stood on the ship's floor. He stripped off his helmet and stood, blue eyes fixed accusingly on Tom.

Marty said, "I came back, Tom."

Tom Lund stood quiet—thankful, saying nothing.

The ice-blue eyes never wavered, "I looked at the fuel gauges, and I came back. I was too angry to look last night." He took a step closer, and his voice shook with emotion. He said, "You great fool. How did you expect to move north without fuel?"

Still Tom stood silent, and Marty said, anger and warmth mixed in his voice, "You'll never change will you? Filling my tanks would have been enough. Just filling my tanks would have let me make Terra, with half a tank left. But that wasn't enough for you. You had to strip yourself and pump my reserve tanks full."

Tom Lund said, sheepishly, "You never know. Sometimes you need extra fuel."

Marty said, level-eyed, "And what about you? Did you have fuel to move north? Did you have extra fuel for emergency on the way in? You did not. If anything had happened you might have stranded in space."

His voice was a hard mask to conceal the depth of his emotion, "Damn you, Tom. It's time you listened to me. I'm going to run things around here a while."

Tom suddenly wanted to sit down. Weakness—reaction was upon him.

Marty said, "We move north tomorrow. You take the BABY, I take the Huntress. You're going to have to get used to the Baby, for half the time you'll use her, and I'll run the Huntress. Half the spiders I go after myself, while you sit back and cover me. From here on, everything, danger, plans, hazard, is half mine. Do

you understand that?"

Tom said, "Sure, Marty, sure." He was suddenly aware of a great strength in his brother, strength to lean on, to depend on; and without knowing it he had been wanting to lean on someone a long, long time.

Marty said, "One more thing. You put on your space suit and go over to Barbara right away. Tell her you love her. She's been waiting to hear that for years."

Tom said, "Huh?"

Marty grinned at him, blue eyes dancing. "I wasn't at school long this year before I knew it. She wasn't for

me. It was just that you liked her, and things you liked always seemed the best to me."

Tom asked slowly, "You've told Barbara this?"

"Yes, now get over there."

Tom Lund got up and moved to the space lock in a dream. Just before he closed the door it was snatched from his hand, and held so he could not close it, and the face of his brother was leering around at him. His brother's voice said, suspiciously mirthful, "You great fool. If you're going out, put on your space suit."

"COMING EVENTS . . ."

BY

JOHN CORD

CRANSTONE sat in perfect darkness. The only illumination came from the instrument panel and the radar screen—a vague ghostly green. Through the plastodome of the rocket interceptor, he could see nothing for all the buildings on the field—as well as the runway lights—were blacked out. He knew there were hundreds of other craft on similar fields waiting as he was, for "the word". He fumbled with cigarette and matches. The light flared briefly outlining Cranstone's taut features.

When? When? The word pounded through his mind savagely. The War had already started and everyone knew the enemy rocket bombers were well on their way. And he and men like him were expected to stop them.

The communications speaker crackled: "Interceptors eight-oh-six to eight-oh-twenty-four—attention. Enemy rockets have just crossed the Arctic Circle. Our guided missiles have knocked down seven. They are type Ilyin piloted rocket bombers capable of evasive and defensive action, and the..."

The words droned on, elaborate technical phrases and military mumbo-jumbo. Cranstone listened with half his mind. He pictured Major Smith crouched over the Communications Desk, soaking up and digesting vast amounts of information, a cool thinking machine conscious of only his vast responsibility. Cranstone's job was simple. He just had to use his skills. He just had to knock down one enemy rocket bomber to justify his existence. But poor Smith carried the weight of a successful operation on his shoulders.

Cranstone thought, I'm glad I'm not

him! The military voice tapered off in the speaker.

Now it was the human Major Smith talking: "This isn't a pep-talk, men," he said softly, "but you know what the score is. We can't let the rocket-bombers get through. Our strike is headed for Chicago. You know what that means. Their trajectory shows that anyway. We can't let them through. Do your best." There was a deep intense pleading in the man's voice.

Suddenly Smith's voice faltered, went falsetto and shrilled. "Now!" it shouted, "now!" Then simultaneously the starting light on Cranstone's instrument panel winked. He knew the same thing was happening all around him.

He jammed home the throttle lever. The gigantic hand of acceleration seized the rocket-interceptor and flung Cranstone tight against the seat. This is it, he thought jubilantly! The roaring hissing noises faded. Cranstone became one huge eye focused on the radar screen in front of him. His experienced eye separated the pups that distinguished enemy from friend. The winking green dot near the center of the screen by the cross-hairs was his!

He kept the dot there. His distance indicator showed a rapidly decreasing interval. Here forty thousand feet above the Earth, in utter blackness, his rocket maneuvered to destroy the invader. Cranstone felt the slight jerk that indicated his rockets were away. The pip started to vanish—then was gone. Cranstone hammered on the plastodome and screamed into his phone: "I got him! I got him!"

Forty thousand feet down and seventy miles away, Major Smith said softly, "Scratch 'em boys, Scratch 'em..."

MUTANT MENACE

BY
ROBERT SAMSON

CLEARING crouched behind a pillar in the Museum hall. It was a vast room compartmented by supporting posts. It was jet black and Clearing felt that he was out in space. But it was a good place to hide. He heard the scuttling noise once more. His fingers tightened on the heat pistol.

The bio-labs should never have trusted the tank, he thought. They should have known the gigantic crayfish would eventually stir. Damn Wilson and his foolish experimenting! Why the hell didn't he listen to me? Why let an irradiated crayfish grow to thirty feet in length? An idiot could see what a danger that could be. Now I'm alone with the monster and I'm supposed to stop him with a heat pistol! What a joke, he thought sardonically, the devil is hunting me!

There was no chance to get to a communicator. They weren't in the museum section. And he couldn't run away. Suppose the beast slipped into the city? God only knows what toll he'd take of the unsuspecting before they blasted him to fragments.

The sickening briny stench came to Clearing's nostrils. The slithering, clicking sounds of the gigantic crustacean became loud and clear. He was on Clearing's trail. If it ever got him in the open, it would be too bad.

Clearing peered around the pillar. He caught sight of the hideous creature, all eight-foot claws and wavering antennae. He raised the pistol and took careful aim.

He squeezed the trigger and the white hot beam lashed out. An unearthly cry split the night air and the monster writhed in agony. Clearing saw a severed claw.

The beast could be beaten! Boldly he advanced on him. The armored crustacean moved toward him rapidly, the scuttling madly. Another ray of moonlight outlined the bulk. Clearing fired once more. Again the screech! Instinctively Clearing recoiled.

The combat went on for ten minutes more, but Clearing's weapon, the heat pistol, was more than a match for the mutated crayfish. As bolt after bolt struck it, its motions became feebler until finally it lay still.

It's dead, Clearing thought; now for Wilson. He reached the office and flooded the building with light. Still keeping an eye on the huge bulk lying on the museum floor, he got Wilson.

He stared at the man's face as it came onto the screen.

"There's your baby from the tank. Take a good look at it, Wilson. It almost got me. You and I must have a talk." Without waiting for an answer, he flipped the switch. Carelessly he walked over to the carcass of the giant.

He was two feet away from the badly burned claw when the contractual death agony of the nerveless creature occurred. He dropped the pistol and turned to run. But it was too late...

MARBLES IN THE MUD

By EDWARD HENLEY

"...and if the Earth ever has an atomic war," the Astronomer concluded his talk, "its surface would look much like that of the Moon. In the latter case it was a meteoric bombardment, we know, that made craters on the Moon, like a child dropping marbles in a mud-bath. God forbid that it should ever happen."

The interested little audience applauded quietly and then broke into small groups discussing the whole matter.

"It would take a lot of bombs to do that," someone commented, speaking to the Astronomer.

"Yes," he agreed, "it would take a fair number, but remember that if the bombs were big enough they'd even blow away our atmosphere, which would leave the surface of the planet exposed to real meteoric bombardment just like the Moon is today. Then in a few tens or hundreds of millions of years, outside of size nobody'd be able to tell the difference between the Earth and the Moon."

"We won't be alive to worry about it," some other speaker laughed. "Remember the gag about the drunk in the lecture hall? The lecturer said, '...and in twenty billion years the Earth'll be a burnt cinder.' A drunk in the rear of the hall hollered out: 'How many years?' The prof looked annoyed and answered, 'In twenty billion years.' 'Oh,' said the drunk, 'I sought you shaid twenny millyun.'" There was a polite laugh and the meeting broke up.

And then aeons passed...

The Antarian glanced out the port of the exploration ship. "Here," he commanded, "look, Del-lon. A set of twin worlds! Both are badly meteor-scored."

Del-lon nodded, "Wonder what lost them their atmospheres?" he said speculatively. "It does seem odd. Should we take a look?"

"No, no. We must keep on. The council is only interested in planetary systems with life or which once were capable of supporting life. Those shells?—bah..."

TOMB of the

by
Henry Hasse

I MUST HAVE marched forever. My insides were sawdust. How can you tire out sawdust? I clawed and scraped and dragged my flagellated carcass across the muck of the M'Tonak Canal, up through tangles of *dranga* weed that sliced



"Don't shoot, Red!" she cried. "It's me — Duura! Have you forgotten me so soon?"

SEVEN TAAJOS

Somewhere in the red bosom of Mars was the secret of his amnesia. But there are times when losing your memory may save your life!

and burned. The sun was banging away, a hard and hot yellow. My skull was banging away and wouldn't let me rest. I only knew that behind me lay the sweep of the South Mars desert, and there too lay terror; a terror that reached out and resolved into scalpels of pain, trying to slice a warning.

"Turibek," I think I moaned. "I've



got to reach Turibek..." But I didn't know why, and then the thought was gone.

There came again the sound of 'copters...or was it only a memory? I thought I heard them whirring away in the distance, sweeping low in a wide search. For a long time I didn't move. The whirring wouldn't go away, so I knew it must be occurring inside my head. The pain was coming on again.

I remember reaching a gully and sloughing through stagnant water and glimpsing a high, bright roadbed above. I remember clawing my way up and leaning against the damp earth to vomit. That's when I knew I could never make it. That's when my sawdust insides collapsed, and I felt the acrid soil of Mars in my face just before I didn't feel anything....

You've heard the dream-call of a person suffering a nightmare? A weird sort of hoo-hooing, it's a sound to chill the spine especially as you struggle awake and realize it's coming from your own throat.

"Steady there, *Rhal!*" I heard that, too, and then a chuckling wheeze that reminded me of a rocket-tube when the fuel is burned out. "Here, Try this."

Glass against my teeth. Familiar! I clamped around the neck of the bottle and took a long swallow of raw Martian rotgut. I shuddered and leaned forward. I became conscious of a fluid motion beneath me. I opened my eyes.

I was in the front seat of one of those three-wheeled Martian vehicles. Sun-glare hammered across the roadbed ahead of us, a road that seemed to parallel the abandoned Canal-walls. I twisted around to look at my benefactor.

Most Martians are brown and ugly

and lean. This one lived up to it save in one respect: he was fat! The tight leathery skin across his little moon face was a blotch of brown and tan. His hair was a wisp, the teeth but a memory. Beneath his bulging brow I saw eyes that were protruding and lidless and devoid of color, reminding me of large watery swamp-grapes.

Anyway, I liked his liquor! I tilted the bottle for another try. He grinned at me, showing brownish stumps of teeth.

He handed me a slip of wrinkled parchment.

"Sorry, *Rhal!* I can't help you on this. Tomb of the Seven Taajos—what does it mean?"

I took the paper from him. I stared at it dully. Nothing registered. There were just those five words in a ragged script: *Tomb of the Seven Taajos*. Was the writing supposed to be mine? *I didn't know who I was or how I'd come here or why I should be afraid!*

"What is this?" My voice—and it didn't register either.

"Don't you know?"

I shook my head. I stared at the slip of parchment and tried to think back. It was no use. I said, "Where did you see me first?"

"Back there on the road. Walking along like a man in his sleep!"

"Did I say anything?"

"No. Just handed me that paper." He glanced at me sharply. "Yes, you were mumbling something. Turibek, you had to reach Turibek! Tell me, Earthman—were you trying to reach the capital-city on foot? It's twenty miles across desert!"

Something warned me, something of cunning in his voice. I looked at the man more closely. He was High Martian, perhaps a political or pro-

fessional; the expensive cut of his right-fitting garment and flowing tunic told me that. Twice he had used the word *Rhal*. I recognized it as a Martian word meaning "red."

I looked back along the road, but there were no other vehicles; apparently this highway was very little travelled. Far across the Canal bottom the desert was a sweep of endless ochre. That's the way I had come. But surely not afoot! Across the horizon's rim I saw a thin line that might be a mountain range, and the darkening sky over there told me that a magnetic storm was building up.

I twisted around to face the little Martian.

"Why do you call me 'Red'?"

HE OPENED wide his colorless eyes. I could see them calculate a moment. Then he reached forward, adjusted a mirror so I could look into it.

"What else would I call a perfect stranger like you—a flaming-haired Earthman." His voice was a soft slur as he added, "And trying to reach Turibek on this, of all days."

I took a look. I saw long red hair that was tangled and grimed. I saw a thin hungry face, youngish, good-looking in a grim sort of way; but it was a face I didn't remember. Deep-set gray eyes searched the mirror frantically, then gave it up.

"My name is Klaeg," he was saying. "Doctor Klaeg. Hold still a minute, *Rhal*." His fingers probed softly at my skull above the left ear. "Do you feel a pain there, a steady pain?"

There was something ghoulish about him and his pudgy fingers and the way he said the words. I jerked my head away. I probed with

my own fingers and felt a circular cut, only half healed, that sliced beneath the flesh. A similar cut was over my right ear, another at the base of my skull. And I didn't know how they came there!

"Amnesia," the fat little Martian was saying. *I knew that he lied!* "Partial amnesia only. I'm experienced in these things. If you would allow, I think I could—"

He stopped suddenly, leaned forward in the seat. I peered through the crystyte shield and followed his gaze. Far ahead a dark shape came winging across the sands. Then I caught a glint of sun on burnished blue-and-silver. A 'copter!

Panic clawed at my brain. I looked down at my right hand. It had started trembling. I couldn't stop the trembling.

"One of Emperor Bedril's *Specials*." Faint annoyance was in Klaeg's voice. "They've been active today! I've never seen them so thick!" He peered again, and then turned to me. "Heading this way. Better get in the back! No matter what happens, don't move!"

I DIDN'T stop to question. I climbed to the back and crawled beneath a piece of cloth, a robe of some kind. Again that aching throb in my skull. My body started to shake and I couldn't stop it. I bit deep into the back of my hand. I tell you it's a feeling, being afraid, not knowing why you're afraid....

The whirring blades were close. I heard a thin whine of atomo-motors and then that was gone. I knew the 'copter was setting down on the roadway.

"Don't move," Klaeg whispered. "Don't make a sound. It's going to be all right."

I tried to breathe without breathing. The Specials were Bedril's secret police—from somewhere in the matrix of my past I knew that. I pictured the 'copter sitting there. I pictured the Special coming over to Klaeg's car. Then I didn't need to picture it because I was hearing it: a Martian's soft-slurred accents.

"So it's you, Doctor Klaeg. You're on the way back to L'Ottli?"

"Yes. I have a shipment of medicines for my hospital."

"Won't mind if I take a look?"

I heard Klaeg laugh amiably. "Go right ahead!"

They were standing in the road, close to the door where I crouched. I started to picture it again. The Special was looking down at the cloth. He was going to lift the cloth. Then I could feel it—his fingers touching the edge of the cloth.

And Klaeg saying suddenly, his voice a confident whisper: "Oh, by the way, Aarnto...."

They were walking away, and I breathed again. I ventured a look. The Special was tall and leathery and tightly uniformed in blue. He listened to Klaeg, and took on a crooked smile as he accepted some Martian credits from the fat doctor.

I felt a wetness on my lips, and it was blood. I didn't mind that. I was thinking, *why is Klaeg doing this? Why should he want to help me?* The Special climbed back in the 'copter, it rose in a sharp climb and winged away. I skipped out of Klaeg's car and stood there still shaking, still not knowing why I was afraid...but in that moment I think it was fear of this fat little Martian.

"I'll be leaving you here, Doc," I said grimly. "Thanks for everything."

The smile left his pudgy blotched

face. "Better not! You'll never reach Turibek! As I started to tell you, I think I could fix up that head of yours—"

I only knew that he wasn't going to monkey with my head if I could help it! A fury came over me, I took a stride forward and Klaeg tumbled back in haste. That did something to me. I laughed aloud. I could handle a dozen like him!

"Look," I told him. "I don't know who I am or what I'm doing here, but I'm damn soon going to find out, and I don't need your help either!"

"But you do," he purred. "You need my help and you're going to need it worse before this day is over. A case of amnesia like yours should have attention quick...and I don't mean from Bedril's Specials!" There seemed a secret meaning to the words, a grim humor, as he pointed a finger at my chest.

Startled, I looked down. It was strange I hadn't noticed what kind of clothes I was wearing...but I noticed now. They were plain black, of heavy tough texture and without ornament. A sort of jacket and pants that seemed a little tight for me.

The garments of convicts at the Martian radite pits!

CHAPTER II

THINGS didn't blur. I didn't stagger. I simply stood there numbed and didn't feel anything. Klaeg was back in the car, the atomos hummed to life.

"Well—are you coming?"

I fell back a step, shaking my head stubbornly.

For a moment his eyes glittered. "All right, *Rhal*. I've done my best. My place won't be hard to find...

at the edge of L'Ottli, about ten miles from here."

As I watched him speed away, I had a feeling I'd be seeing more of Doctor Klaeg—and I think he knew it too! Then a burst of panic hit me. I turned northeast, then east, then east-by-south, like a compass on a binge. I plunged off the road and went tumbling down the bank, to alight in the soft muck of the Canal-bottom. Here at least I was safe from the 'copters! Afar off I heard the coughing snarl of a *kalamar*, but I knew the night-creatures never came this far.

I was concious of the convict clothes, and now my terror had reason. *But there was no memory of the Martian prison pits! I must think! I had to think!* From the jacket pocket I brought out the slip of parchment and stared again at the scribbled words, Tomb of the Seven Taajos. It might have been my handwriting; there was no way I could tell. I thrust it back into the pocket, and my fingers touched something else.

I drew out a thin, curved plexicon frame. A colorphoto of a girl, three-dimensional, almost life-like. I stared long and hard but it didn't strike any spark of memory. Her face had a sullen sort of beauty, humid and passionate. The hair gleamed with the black lustre of hard coal and was drawn straight back from her fine-chiselled, ivory features. I thought she might be an Earth girl, until I stared closer and saw that her color was a bit more than ivory, with eyes the pure swimming amber of a cat's. I'd seen this kind before. She was a product of two worlds, a Terramars half-breed.

And the lips—I stared some more, as a strange kind of chill went

along my spine. The lips were so garishly red it looked as if she had been slugged in the teeth by someone who hated her intensely!

PHOBOS was a ball of yellow silk on the horizon, and then Deimos appeared, riding high on liquid sapphire. Night-shadows were dancing about my head when I thought of Klaeg again, and maybe he was right, and I had to get into other clothes, and food in my stomach....

That's when I came sharply around a turn and saw the wreckage of the little cruiser.

It was an eight-jet interplanet job of Earth design, with under-hull repulsion plates blackened and twisted. It had crashed down through an enormous pile of desert drift, to bury itself in the soft Canal-bottom. I approached slowly, clutching at masses of *dranga* weed and gnarled, storm-stricken trees. Suddenly a dark stump rose up and smote me.

I staggered back, as the man I'd mistaken for a stump lunged forward. I lost balance and went down. I squirmed in the muck and brought up a knee and heard a heavy grunt. I grabbed out blindly. He crashed across me, and for a moment his hair was in my face—thick oily hair with an over-powering odor of pomade. Then he scrambled free, and I heard him crashing away through the brush.

I followed for a few yards and then changed my mind, realizing that he was probably as frightened as I. He was much too huge to be Martian, and I'd never known a Martian with that type of oily odorous hair. I eased my way forward and reached the cruiser.

From what I could see in the

dancing shadows, it didn't appear too damaged. I walked around to the middle port. It was open. Dark streaks of oil were splashed about. Then I looked closer, and got a little sick, and wondered if it were oil...

Huddled inside the entrance was a man. An Earthman, so far as I could tell. There was nothing I could do for him now. The entire side of his face and part of his skull was gone, and I realized *that* hadn't occurred in the crash. Someone had used a deadly Martian *kra* blaster at very close range!

My gaze dropped, and I began cursing softly. Scattered about the ground were a variety of objects. Cheap gilded sandals, tins of Earth tobacco torn apart, some dark-faced dolls of heavy plastic, a dozen other items—all cheap trade stuff from Earth. It looked as if someone had gone through the cargo piecemeal, tossing it all outside.

I stepped into the ship, but all was a shambles there too. I closed my eyes and tested my memory. None of this meant a thing to me, and yet strangely I felt that it should. A weakness came over me as that pain started shrieking through my skull again. Had I been here before? Maybe. Maybe I knew this dead man. Maybe anything!

Maybe I was the one who had killed him...was that what Klaeg meant?

Fright dug deep into me. Again I touched those half-healed scars at either side of my skull, and wondered how they came there. Only one thing was clear: those Specials were on the hunt! I would need a change of clothes.

I came back to the dead man, hauled him out and began the change. It wasn't a pleasant task

but I forced myself to it. Whoever or whatever I was, they'd never take me back to the radite pits!

Suddenly I remembered something Klaeg had said. *Trying to reach Turibek on this, of all days.* What was going on at Mars' capital-city? Why was I so frantically desperate to reach there? I straightened abruptly as the clear hum of a 'copter reached my ears. Peering through the tangle of drift, I could see the prow lights as it winged fast and low. This was no Government 'copter! It came in a straight line from the direction of L'Ottli, and before I could move it was settling down on the roadbed just above me!

I thrust the dead man out of sight and crouched back into the shadows. Hurried footsteps pelted along the Canal wall. A beam sliced downward, caught me momentarily. I hurled myself aside.

"Rhal! Rhal, darling—is it you? Don't be afraid..."

A woman's voice!

S*HE mustn't come down here!* was my first thought in the instant of panic. Then I was clambering up the bank, and my thoughts ran in a swift cold stream. *Easy does it! Easy. This is the break you need. Get very close, then knock her out and grab the 'copter...*

I got close, all right. She ran into my arms and grabbed hold of me, sobbing.

"Rhal, Rhal, thank heaven I found you! Doctor Klaeg told me he saw you. He should have made you come back! Don't worry, darling, everything will be all right now..."

Her anxiety sounded real. She certainly felt real. Her head came

to just above my shoulders. I pushed her away, looked into her amber cat eyes and recognized her as the girl in the photo.

My head was buzzing again. "You'll pardon me, Miss, I just don't seem to—"

Grief struck her eyes. Her lips trembled.

"It's all right, Rhal. Doctor Klaeg told me it would be like this." She held up her right hand, and I saw a ring set with a large blue *azurine*.

"I'm your wife! Duura! Don't you remember even that?"

I stood there with my eyes coming out of my face. I waited for something, but it didn't happen. Not to my heart, anyway.

"Come, darling. I think the Specials have stopped searching, but we can't take chances! We must get to the hospital now." She put a hand in mine, led me over to the 'copter. I let her do it. I felt my resolve flowing away. It was something about her eyes, I think.

We rose in a steep climb. Far to the north above the rising dunes I caught a glow in the sky that I knew must be Turibek...but we headed in an opposite direction. My head felt like a blossom of flame tugging away. Again she turned those eyes on me.

"Don't tremble, dear. It's all right! No one saw the dead man but me—"

"Dead man?" I sat up quick. "What dead man? Don't you try to scare me!"

She made little crooning sounds. "Your head is hurt, darling. But don't you worry about that, or the dead Earthman, or anything. Doctor Klaeg will perform an operation and you'll remember again. You'll remember about the Tomb of the Seven TaaJos—"

Klaeg. Doctor Klaeg. I remem-

bered him! The fat little genie of a Martian who wanted to monkey with my head! I glanced at Duura as she leaned forward to adjust the controls. I fixed my gaze on a point below her right ear; just below the ear was the best place.

My right hand formed a fist. I tightened it. My arm drew back.

Duura looked at me and smiled. Half-breed or not, she was predominantly Terran. In the panel lights her teeth were white and neat. Her lips didn't seem so garish red now, like in the photo. She leaned over and kissed me on the mouth, and held it, and put plenty of meaning into it.

"Lay your head on my lap, darling. We'll be there soon."

I did as she said. I looked drowsily at her. Her profile was perfect—all the way down. I sighed and listened to the soothing thrum of the motors, and then my eyes closed.

I was very, very tired.

CHAPTER III

I WAS ON my back, something held me flat on my back while a huge mottled snake came gliding out of space toward my brain. It was a very lovely reptile. It reminded me of Venus swamp-lilies.

My eyes wouldn't open. There was an oily alien smell and a tumult of voices and someone was arguing.

"Leave him alone, you fool! Get out—get out! Your job comes later."

"Do it now, Klaeg! What in hell you waiting for? Can't you do it now?"

"Shut up, all of you! He almost reached Turibek, thanks to your bungling."

The pressure in the middle of my chest went away, and the oily smell went away, and the reptile made a

turn inside my head.

"All right, he's resting easy now. We'll leave him for a while."

"Damn it, Klaeg, damn it, Klaeg, can't you do it now? Do it now, Klaeg! Do it—"

That was Duura's voice. Duura of the cruel lips, Duura of the photograph.

"Look, can't you get it through your head he's in acute fatigue? He's got to rest! Twenty-four hours."

"Doc! You zure you can handle thiz? If there's any zlip-up now... if the Zpecialz come..." I didn't like that voice. It was the oily odorous voice. Where had I smelled that odor before?

"—strange sort of amnesia. It seems to be induced! There's a slight bone fracture across the frontal lobe, so I may have to cut deep, or even use a Scanner to reach the area. Now get out of here, Dhaarj!"

Far away a door whispered open and closed with a sigh. The reptile slid forward and coiled about my eyeballs. I fell into sleep and dreamed of a dead man pacing endlessly before a tomb tucked away beneath seven *taajos* trees. When I tried to approach he turned and faced me, and I saw a ragged hole in his skull, and half of his face was gone, and he grinned as he thrust a dark-faced doll at me.

I dreamed other things. I dreamed I was back on Earth and a man was telling me something terribly urgent. I listened to him intently and nodded my head....

Then I was awake. Something hurt my eyes. It was sunlight. I opened my eyes and blinked in the bright sunlight.

FOR A MINUTE I lay in the white sheeted bed and looked about the

room. I saw some rare old Martian furniture, but the walls were bare heavy stone. I crept from the bed and felt strong. They had dressed me in soft comfortable clothes.

They!

The fat Doctor Klaeg and Duura with the *azurine* ring. I remembered them instantly. I walked over to a mirror, examined my head and prod it gently. Relief swept over me as I saw that Klaeg hadn't worked on me yet.

Bluish light swam across a section of wall, and I had a sudden feeling I was being watched. I padded over to a large open window. I was fifty feet above ground. L'Ottli lay below me, desolate and empty, with strange conical structures crumbling into ruin against the storm-swept sand. A Martian mining town, a ghost town, long abandoned.

The door behind me opened and Duura said, "Don't jump, Rhal. Don't do that."

I turned abruptly. Her eyes were cold, the lips curved and cruel again like in the photograph. I said, "Did I sleep long—darling?"

"Long enough. Twenty hours." She came and took my arm and she didn't smile. "We'll go downstairs and have breakfast. I think you need it. Then Klaeg will want to talk to you."

I shook her hand aside. "Get the hell away from me—darling!"

She looked at me without expression. She shrugged, turned back to the door and called, "You! Come on in here."

The man who entered was Jovian. He looked at me and grinned broadly. It didn't fool me. All Jovians grinned. Some of them grinned while breaking a man's vertebrae! This was one of the big ones, and he was ugly. He had long reaching

arms and oily hair that tumbled about his shoulders and a face that looked as if he'd slept in it.

I looked at his hair and sniffed. I remembered. The man at the wrecked cruiser.

"You," I said, "would be Dhaarj."

"Do I have a choize?" He moved nearer. "Downztairz, now. Let us have no trouble...."

So they were going to treat me gently, like a spoiled little child. It suited me fine. I walked out of the room and they were close behind me. We reached a short flight of stairs leading down, and I paused.

"Ztraight down," the Jovian said as he came beside me, and then I clamped both hands across his wrist and heaved. Dhaarj let out an oath as he tumbled downward. Duura was screaming at him. I sped back along the corridor, and for a moment there was no sound except my heavy breathing. Then I heard their pounding feet behind me. I turned into a cross-corridor and increased my stride.

They have no weapons! the thought hammered at me. *They want to save me alive for Klaeg!* I was never more wrong. There came the hum of a beam past my ear, so close I could feel the shock of it. That was a parala-beam! I raced for a stairway just ahead. I was halfway up when they came into view below me. Again the parala-beam lanced out, but I was beyond range.

I reached the floor above...and was sick with the realization that I'd come into a trap. Only a short corridor reached ahead of me, ending against a blank wall. I searched frantically and then turned like a trapped animal to wait for Duura and the Jovian.

My fingers encountered a slight

projection on a ledge behind me. I whirled, tugged at it with desperate urgency. A whole section swung silently inward. I dashed inside as my pursuers appeared on the stairs, and the aperture instantly closed. There came an ascending whine of coils as a metal disc carried me swiftly down into darkness....

THE COILS stopped humming, the motion ceased and I knew I must be on ground level. A door pivoted open. I stepped into another cold, bare corridor. Far to the left I glimpsed a small square of light. I moved toward it silently, half running, reserving my strength.

It was a greater distance than I thought, but there was no sound of pursuit now. Ahead of me the walls widened out into a grotto with heavy metal bars reaching down to form a sort of cage. Across the ceiling a thick greenish light beat down, but this was no ordinary light; here was the raging inferno of miniature atomic-vortex held in leash by some unknown means, perhaps a field of force. There was something wicked and nauseating about it.

I stared for a moment and started to move on, when there came a sound of guttural voices within the cage. Several shapes were moving forward against the downpour of light. Fascinated, I stood there...and the fascination turned to horror.

The creatures peering out at me were gaunt and faintly furred, with bestial lips writhing back to reveal fanged teeth. Their arms seemed preternaturally long and dangling; eyes were reddish-tinged and filmed over with horror, as if they *knew* what was happening, were aware that they had once been men!

And then came the ultimate horror. They reached claws out to me and tried to speak. There was a

pitiful pleading about it. Through the animal sounds I recognized some words of garbled Martian. Peering closer, I saw that most of them were clad in tattered rags of duraplex—the sort of clothes that Martian prospectors wore.

Avatisms! Doctor Klaeg was responsible for this! These were poor prospectors who had somehow been captured out of the foothills to serve in a ghastly experiment!

The impact of it left me stark and sweating against the wall... and then the mists of light reached out. Where it touched I could feel a tingling at my nerve-centers, a tugging at my brain, an unhealthy prying beneath the flesh. I fled the place and I didn't stop.

Now I could see the square of light ahead. Horror was still upon me. Once outside, I could hide in the ruins of L'Ottli or make my way into the desert where they'd never find me! Better still, if I could only learn where they kept that 'copter... Breathless, I reached a crystyte-paneled door. I could feel glorious sunlight just beyond. I pushed through the door and found myself in a lush garden encircled by a high wall. And I stopped...

Sitting at a table beneath a little arbor was Doctor Klaeg. Duura and Dhaarj were there too, jabbering away at him—something about me. I felt suddenly very weak as Dhaarj came toward me, grinning.

Klaeg looked up and smiled at me. "Good morning, Rhal. I trust you have slept well? Let us have breakfast together."

THEY FORCED me into a resilient chair at the end of the table. I needed food, I couldn't remember when I had eaten last. Mechanically I gobbled a highly-seasoned bisque, a pungent broth and a thick

pudding with the cloying odor of Canal flowers. All the while Klaeg kept looking at me with those lidless eyes.

"You're feeling better, Rhal. I can see it already. Maybe you're even beginning...to remember." He leaned forward, pudgy fists on the table. "The *taajos* trees? The seven *taajos*—and the tomb? You ought to remember that. Maybe I won't have to do the operation—if you remember."

I felt my guts curl up inside of me. I was still remembering those half-human creatures down there in the corridor. I saw Duura standing by, watching me expectantly. And Dhaarj. I didn't take my eyes off Dhaarj.

They were waiting for me to speak.

"I—I don't know." I didn't, either! All this talk about taajos trees. What did these people want? Calm, there Red! Stop that hammering in your skull! That won't get you any—

I took a tight grip on my nerves. "Klaeg, I'll tell you this. I remember you picking me up on the Canal road. I remember a slip of paper, and being afraid of the Specials, and I remember getting out of your car. Previous to that, everything's clear as mud."

"Mud settles, Earthman, if you give it time."

"Then give me time! Damn it, give me time to think. I want to remember—" *Steady, Red, steady! Stop that hammering—*

"Unfortunately, we haven't time. No time at all."

A picture seared my brain, and words were tumbling out. "I remember this! A cruiser that crashed in the Canal-bottom—an Earth cruiser, a trader! And I saw a dead Earthman there! Half of his skull was blasted away, and—"

Klaeg was pushing back his chair.

He was standing up. He was more than a fat little Martian now, he looked mean and ugly, and his bulging swamp-grape eyes were a glitter. He was saying, "An Earthman? He says he saw a dead Earthman? Hallucination. The pressure on the brain, the frontal lobe..."

There was more, all muddled up. Klaeg was talking fast, giving instructions to Duura, something about an operation. I sat there clutching at my head... and then I saw Dhaarj coming to help me from the chair. I didn't need any help! I leaped up, lashed out with my left fist.

It landed flush on the Jovian's chin. It was a good solid punch but it hardly moved him. I then put two hard rights into his neck and another beside his ugly nose, and he looked at me in astonishment. I heard someone say, "Not on the head, Dhaarj!"

Dhaarj snorted and hit me in the solar-plexus.

I bent over and took hold of the ground and gave it a good hard spin. It made a beautiful pattern. There were circles and triangles that whirled in varying colors. I grinned as I watched them, and then all at once something landed on my head.

It was me.

THE ROOM was hot and stifling. From somewhere the breath of rotting flowers came up like a miasma.

Then the insects. The shrilling of insects was everywhere. They reminded me of the locusts in my long-ago days on Earth. There had been an old superstition that the cry of locusts in such numbers signaled death.

I stirred weakly and blinked and saw a white-gowned figure bending over me.

I couldn't see what he was doing; I just stared at his eyes and thought

of a time when I was a kid on Earth and caught a locust and looked close at its eyes. It had mean, bulging, hateful eyes—just like Doc Klaeg's now.

I breathed in some more of the sickish-sweet miasma, and knew it wasn't from flowers.

I dreamed, and in my dreams they had me tied to a table and were throwing darts into my bleeding skull. The heads of the darts were little metal locusts. There was a snake, too. The great bronze creature coiled around my forehead, and made my brain very hot, and whenever one of the darts hit me the snake would have a spasm.

It all went away finally. Sunlight came, then shadowy Martian night with a magnetic storm somewhere out over the desert. During all this interim I saw Klaeg several times again, bending over me. And Duura once, propping me up and feeding me some of that pungent broth. And Dhaarj always. Every time I opened my eyes I saw the Jovian's ugly bulk in a chair across the room. I came to have a horror of him.

I thought I heard Klaeg saying once, "He'll come out of it fast. We must be ready."

At last I came awake and stayed awake, and that was worst of all. *Because I remembered!*

I remembered me, and how I came to Mars, and all that went before.

I remembered DeHarries, Co-ordinator for Earth, and his desperately urgent voice as he briefed us on this mission.

I remembered the flight from Earth. Most of all I remembered the cruiser, and the wreck of the cruiser, and the name of the other man in the cruiser who was my friend... but he was dead now.

"Manning. George Manning." I lay there remembering it all, as dor-

mant areas of my brain were pushed into activity.

DeHarries' briefing had been thorough and to the point. Manning and I were chosen because of our previous experience in the trade-lanes. The plans we were carrying to the Inter-Planet Council at Turibek were of utmost importance, but to send a convoy along would be to reveal the site chosen for the secret Council, and might be construed as a show of strength. Such things must be avoided. Each planet was sovereign, and hypersensitively suspicious of the slightest encroachment upon those rights.

Only after years of negotiation and mutual mistrust had the agreement been reached: each planet to contribute its top secret for the benefit of all. This could be the only means of quelling a growing unrest that was leading inevitably to war. Venus had agreed to give up the secret of her invulnerable, allotropic metal. Mercury's contribution were the vast Solar Discs that protected her cities from the sun, but were powerful weapons as well. Mars had Multi-Energon-Screens. Jupiter was willing to present the Frequency Tuner, a hyper space-drive which every planet had long coveted.

And Earth's contribution, her most powerful weapon...I thought of it now. The Energon directional-beam, known as the E-Beam. Radiant energy, heretofore holocaustic but limited, could now be controlled and propelled along this beam for unimaginable distances.

I thought of all this, and my mind went back to George Manning, and I felt the sweat of my hands as I clenched them tight. "Manning. I'll get even, Manning! I swear it! They murdered you, but I swear I'll even the score!"

I must have repeated this end-

lessly, before I sat up and looked across the room, and realized that by some miracle the Jovian was no longer there.

CHAPTER IV

I MOVED quickly to the door. It was locked. That was just as well, because I wouldn't stand a chance in the corridors of this building. I must get to Turibek and see Emperor Bedril and bring the officials back here. Then we could look for that tomb, and the precious package I'd hidden...

I hurried to the windows and pried them open. The ground was a giddy distance below, but I'd have to chance it. I swung out and let myself go and plunged down through a tangle of razor-edged shrubs. One leg twisted painfully in the soft sand.

For a moment I lay there and listened. All was quiet. The magnetic storm was dying away across the desert, while Deimos and Phobos raced in eccentric orbits to cast strange shadows amidst the ruins of L'Ottli.

My only chance now was the 'copter. It must be somewhere about! Hugging the wall, I moved carefully along the side of the huge rambling building. The place seemed totally dark. I wondered where the others were; if Dhaarj came back to that room and found me gone, the alarm would be out...

I reached the far corner. L'Ottli's streets lay before me with strange conical structures tumbling into decay. Suddenly I drew back, and forgot to breathe, as excitement hammered away at my brain. Scarcely fifty yards away on the drifting sands was the hull of a huge black spacer.

And I remembered it well! After reaching Mars, Manning and I had followed a course high above the

South Desert; perhaps we relaxed a little, with Turibek so near. Suddenly, out of nowhere, this black hull appeared above us. It grappled our smaller ship with magnetic beams...under a surge of power we broke away, spun wildly out of control...and then the crash...

Now, as I crouched in the shadows and stared at the deadly black spacer, I realized that whoever had brought it here must be somewhere about. That was a chance I would take! If I could gain this ship I'd be in Turibek in a matter of minutes. I gauged the distance. By hugging the ruins I might reach it safely.

I began the move, thankful for those dancing desert shadows that helped cover me. And when I'd gone half the distance, I saw the guard.

A lone man pacing endlessly before the ship. It was then I heard the voices, so close at hand that I was startled. They seemed to come from a quadrangled ruin just to my left. Moving closer, I saw a chink of light in the storm-battered walls.

KLAEG WAS there, and Duura... and a group of men so strange in appearance that I was held in fascination. They were ebony, with bright green manes flowing about their shoulders, and yellow eyes that gleamed fanatically in the flickering light. One of them, a majestic figure in long robes, stood in the center of the room and watched Klaeg.

Klaeg was pacing with nervous little strides.

"You never should have come here, Khi-Ileth! We're only thirty miles from Turibek. I suppose you know if you're caught, you'll fry on Bedril's torture plates!"

Khi-Ileth waved an ebon hand, smiled inscrutably. "And you as well."

I had heard of these people. The Rajecs, fierce black tribes of the Outland Deserts, who hated the Upper Martians with a hatred beyond understanding. But they had their science, and in recent years the tribes had consolidated to carry on spasmodic wars against the cities to the north. Among the Rajecs were a few renegade Martians, usually outlaws or embittered "politicals," such as Klaeg.

"We brought down the Earth ship for you," Khi-Ileth was saying. "You have caught the Earthman who escaped?"

Klaeg nodded, tugging nervously at his fat fingers.

"And the plans they were carrying? The E-Beam?"

"He hid them! Somewhere out there in the wastes. And there was amnesia...I had to operate. When he comes out of it, we'll find them it we have to scour the entire desert!"

I saw Khi-Ileth's yellow eyes flash contempt. "Those plans, so necessary to your own work. You had them in your grasp and then bungled it. The Earthman outwitted you!"

"We'll get them, I tell you! Khi-Ileth...please go away. Take your men back to the desert. When things have developed I'll contact your ship by Tele-Magnum."

"No, we are safe here...for a while. Come. I should like to see how your experiments in reverse-thalamics are progressing."

Reverse-thalamics! I remembered those half-human creatures I had seen in the corridor. I pressed nearer, shifting my weight against the stone alcove.

"We have supplied you with be-draggled Martians from out of the hills," the Rajec leader was saying, "so it is right that we should see.

You are sure this directional-beam from Earth is what you need to perfect your weapon?"

"Yes! I explained it to you before, Khi-Ileth." Klaeg paced again as he talked. "We have long been aware that the brain has a system of electro-magnetic tuning, which intensifies in certain areas where involved thinking is carried out, but is almost nil in other areas. Long ago I tried to perfect a thalamic ray to increase the *tonus* of the brain, which would activate dormant areas, and in effect, speed up the evolutionary process..."

I saw Khi-Ileth wave an impatient hand, but Klaeg's eyes took on a fanatic gleam.

"In striving for this ray I hit upon a vibratory rate that worked *exactly in reverse!* It slowed down the brain tonus, reacted upon evolutionary glands and metabolism itself! Once started, there is no halting it. It has worked perfectly on Martians and I know it will work on any race—"

Khi-Ileth interrupted. "The point being that you have no means of controlling it, and above all, projecting it as a weapon. And you are sure this E-Beam will serve the purpose."

"Very sure! Can you imagine the effect of such a weapon upon an unsuspecting populace? Or for that matter, upon an entire space-fleet?"

I FELT my stomach turn over in a sickening yawn. So that was the plan! Klaeg in league with these Rajec devils, engaged in an unholy experiment that had to do with reverse-evolution! I had no doubt that the resulting weapon would be used against the Martian populace...without warning...and perhaps even further if Klaeg had his way. And I was sick with another realiza-

tion. I knew that the packet entrusted to Manning and me contained more than the E-Beam plans. *There was a miniature working-model as well.* If Klaeg got his hands on that, he could have larger, long-range beams perfected in a matter of days!

The thought of it brought me erect, and I hurried away from there. I continued along the streets of ruins. Glancing toward the Rajec spacer, I saw that the guard was gone! Luck was with me. I hurried forward...and a black sinewy figure came hurtling at me from the shadows. I had forgotten that these Rajecs were nocturnal-visioned!

Whirling to meet the guard, I glimpsed an *energast* in the dark fist. He tried to bring it into position, but I was too close for that. I clamped fingers about his wrist. I tried to get my other hand about his throat. He grinned at me evilly and squirmed away. I felt suddenly weak from what Klaeg had done to my head. The Rajec was upon me, using his sinewy strength to bear me backward.

I clung fiercely to his wrist, and thought of an ancient trick that had never failed. Moving my feet swiftly, I brought his arm behind him and then threw all of my strength into an upward leverage. Bones snapped as the green-maned figure went sailing backward...and that was my error.

He let out a cry of warning, a shrill "*ai-hee!*" The sound hung shuddering in the night, and then Klaeg, Duura, the entire host of Rajecs were pouring into the street. I reached the guard's *energast*, but before I could bring it up a dozen black bodies were bearing me to the ground. The towering Khi-Ileth came forward, pulled me erect and peered into my face.

"So. This is the Earthman. Klaeg, you are careless!"

Klaeg whirled upon Duura. "Dhaarj! Where is he? Didn't you tell him to stand guard in the room?"

"Yes, I told him to notify us when the Earthman awoke. You cannot depend on that stupid Jovian!"

"No matter," Khi-Ileth purred. "Klaeg, you are sure this Earthman remembers now? You must get those plans!"

Klaeg moved close, looked at me with deadly assurance. "The operation was a success. He remembers. He will take me to that tomb in the wastes; he remembers even that, now."

I surged forward, but felt my arms twisted fiercely behind me.

"If you wish, we Rajecs have methods of persuasion—" Then Khi-Ileth shrugged, his eyes scanned the sky. "But you are right, Klaeg, it isn't safe for us here; there were too many of Bedril's Specials about today. We shall life gravs, but we'll be close at hand over in the hills."

"Good! Rest assured I can handle the brave Earthman." Klaeg grinned at me evilly. "Right, Mr. Vaughn?"

Vaughn. Carl Vaughn. That was me, and Klaeg knew that I knew it now, together with all the rest. Again I tried to leap for his grinning face, but the Rajecs held me back.

Klaeg's eyes glittered as he drove a pudgy fist into my lips. He drove it again, and seemed to enjoy it. "That is for the trouble you have caused! And the delay! It was a good try, Vaughn, but the game is over now. You have lost. It was inevitable!"

CHAPTER V

WE WERE in that high-walled garden again, just Klaeg and I. Around and around we walked, end-

lessly; we might have been the best of pals out for a moonlight stroll except for one thing. Klaeg kept always to the left of me, a few paces away, and in his fat fist he held a Martian *kra* blaster, the genuine thing, the large economy size that blows ones brains into vapor.

"Walk, Vaughn! I want you to get used to your legs again. The dizziness will go away too, and you can think better."

I was thinking better. I was thinking that if only this brute of a Jovian would keep out of the way for a while longer, I might have a chance. I had just seen the Rajecs lift gravs, and I felt better for that. I lessened my stride, watching Klaeg. The bluish light from Phobos made a fat little genie of him. I teetered forward, and with unbelievably fast motion Klaeg swung the *kra* up.

"I'm really good with this!" he snapped.

I believed him, as I thought of the way I had found George Manning. Klaeg had done that. I suddenly felt packed in ice from my lips to the pit of my belly. "Blast me now," I said, "and you'll never find that tomb!"

Klaeg grinned and pressed the stud. The force-beam creased my arm, so close I could feel the crisping of hairs. I went staggering back.

"A sample!" Klaeg said venomously. "If necessary, I'll take one arm and then the other. I shall leave to you only your legs! Now, Vaughn, about face and march! Out to the road. We shall go and find that tomb."

I marched, and felt Klaeg right behind me. Rounding the building, I spotted a grove of trees some distance away. Duura was standing there, and Dhaarj. She was standing very close to Dhaarj, and then I saw

her on tiptoe in the Jovian's arms as she kissed him.

"Talented girl," I remarked thoughtfully. "She bribed me in just about the same way."

Klaeg chuckled behind me. "Yes, she's good at it. I don't quite trust that Jovian! I have a feeling he'd double-cross me for those plans."

We reached the road, and there was the Martian three-wheeler. I glanced back at Klaeg. "Wouldn't the 'copter be faster?"

"I'm taking no chances with you, Earthman. Get in! You're going to drive."

I slid behind the controls. Klaeg took the seat behind me, blaster held in readiness. "You'll never get away with this," I told him. "Manning and I should have been in Turibek by now! Bedril must have received a Tele-message from Earth, that's why the Specials are looking for the Earth cruiser, and they'll be on the hunt again tomorrow. They'll turn this section inside out..."

"By that time I'll have your precious plans and be away from here. There's a Rajec stronghold over in the hills, complete with laboratories—" Klaeg stopped, glared at me, and then brought the blaster forward in a vicious arc. The heavy coils caught me across the cheek. Blood came down and I blinked back the tears. "Stop yammering," he grated, "and drive!"

I drove, but I said one thing more. "I don't see why you keep that Jovian around," I told him. "You do all right."

THE ROAD was a shimmering ribbon atop the Canal wall. Below us the wastes reached away interminably, bright and deadly quiet under Phobos' glow. In a desperate instant I thought of twisting the controls to send us plunging down the

bank, but I knew I wouldn't stand a chance. I'd have to wait for a better opportunity.

"Just drive," Klaeg grated close to my ear, "and don't try to be a hero!"

I drove and I thought hard. I thought of the Inter-Planet Council, the suspicions and accusations that must be occurring because Earth's E-Beam failed to arrive. I thought of DeHarries. His plan for secrecy was good. Everyone concerned had been thoroughly screened. But somewhere along the line Klaeg must have had an operative, who flashed the word of our coming, and they pin-pointed us perfectly. This was more than a renegade Martian and a handful of Outland Desert tribes. It was perfect organization!

I drove, and Klaeg chuckled behind me. "The operation was one of my best," he said proudly. "A real challenge to me. I suppose you know what I found?" He thrust a palm forward and I saw three tiny metal discs that glittered in the moonlight. "Neuro-discs, aren't they? I've heard of them. One on either side of your skull, another at the base of the brain. It was clever of your DeHarries, I must admit that."

Yes, I knew. I remembered the Correlator's explanation to Manning and me. The neuro-discs were planted just beneath the flesh. At any real sign of danger, the E-Beam was to be instantly destroyed, and then a sharp, direct blow to any one of the discs would dissolve tiny inner crystals; this sent minute rays to the brain which brought an induced amnesia, thus completely masking our real mission to Mars.

And I had disregarded the orders! I had tried to be a hero! Crawling out of the smashed cruiser, with some notion of saving the E-Beam,

I had fled somewhere along the Canal-bottom and found a tomb. It must have been immediately after that when the amnesia came...total and very real. A bitter self-reproach welled up in me now, but there was one thing I had to know.

"My loss of memory," I said. "Was it real, or a result of the discs?"

"Both, I think. I had to use a Cerebro-Scanner to reach a certain area, the corpus striatum, or center of consciousness. The rest I achieved by relieving the bone pressure." Klaeg was peering forward, watching the road carefully. We came to a slight angle that I seemed to recognize, and he said, "This is the place. Stop and get out."

THIS WAS where the cruiser had crashed, but it was completely covered over with desert drift now to prevent spotting it from the air. Klaeg shoved me hard, and I went tumbling down the embankment. "Keep going!" he said. "And remember I still have the blaster."

"You do pretty well without one!" I plunged the rest of the way down and Klaeg was right behind.

"Start walking," he said. "No! Not that way. More to the left. Now... keep on a straight line."

The Canal at this juncture was perhaps a quarter of a mile wide, and I was heading straight across toward the opposite desert. I remembered, now. This was the way I had gone before, running, stumbling, clutching a precious packet tight as a terrible pain tore at my skull.

"You see, Vaughn, you do remember," Klaeg's mocking voice came. "When the Rajec spacer brought you down I was waiting. I saw you climb out and start here. You had a long lead on me, but I followed. You reached the gullies

over there and then I lost you. After a long while I saw you heading back—without the package."

We kept walking. I began to notice that my legs were still pretty weak. The entwining *dranga* hampered me, and occasionally I stumbled into sink-holes.

"It was when you were heading back," Klaeg went on, "that you collapsed. You remember all this now, Vaughn?"

"You're doing enough talking for two," I grated. "You tell me!"

"I will. You felt yourself going out. Your head felt funny! You hid the plans over here, and then you figured you'd better write down a description of the place in case you did blank out." Klaeg laughed, and it cut through to my taut nerves. "It wasn't very smart, Vaughn. I found that piece of paper in your shoe."

No, it wasn't smart. I'd bungled it straight down the line. But a man in the throes of amnesia, with uncertainty and error upon him... I remember another thing now. "Those convict clothes," I said. "I suppose you dressed me in them, after I'd collapsed—"

"A master stroke," Klaeg chuckled. "I saw you were knocked pretty badly on the head, and going in circles, so—"

"Fine," I muttered. "You figured when I saw myself in those clothes, not remembering anything, I'd get panicky and come along with you."

"Something like that. I was sure I could bring your memory back, but yours was a peculiar type of injury; I couldn't use force for fear of shocking you into permanent amnesia."

"And when I refused to come along with you, Duura supplied the gentle touch," I wound it up. *I didn't care about all this! I only wanted time to think, to act, to fig-*

ure a way of getting at that blaster!

We walked for two hundred yards and I said nothing more. But I remembered the tomb! I remembered that vividly.

WE WERE nearing the desert now. The coughing snarl of a *kalamar* reached us, but it was far away in the dunes. A pair of *arracks* winged low, shrilling raucously. Once I stopped to stare at a man's skeleton that lay deep in the decaying muck, bones shredding away through the ravages of time and the elements. God only knew what dark event in a far forgotten past had put him there; and was that the fate reserved for me?

I leaped aside as a crimson reptile shape with jet black head reared up in our path.

"Libula!" The cry came from Klaeg. He blasted past my shoulder, and the scaly creature vanished into vapor. He swung the *kra* quickly back to cover me. "Keep going, Vaughn!"

We reached the far edge of the bottoms, and I stared about. The desert reached above us in undulating dunes. I saw a few scattered *taajos* trees leaning low against the sands away from the desert blasts. I could never forget this place.

"Well, Vaughn, which way? You remember!"

I turned left, and we proceeded along the foot of the dunes.

"Let us hope you are right, Vaughn. I searched this entire area and never came on any group of seven *taajos* trees!"

That was understandable. Gullies began to appear, opening out into channeled ravines that twisted far into the desert depths. There were literally dozens of them. A person could search here endlessly, unless—

For an instant I started at a gully

almost hidden by growth. A pair of trees leaned sharply together as though guarding the entrance. This was the place, I remembered it well! I went ahead with scarcely a pause, but Klaeg was alert.

"This one, Vaughn! We'll try this one just for luck!"

He kept pushing me ahead, into the ravine, mouthing threats all the while. Then the *taajos* trees came into view; seven of them in a semi-circular row, with crustaceous white growths clinging like the remnants of integument. Stumbling over roots and loose rock, I passed the first tree and then the second.

"The tomb, Vaughn, the tomb! I'll give you two minutes to find it!"

"How can I remember? It was here in the middle somewhere. It was well hidden." I glanced back, and in the light of *Phobos* Klaeg's eyes looked pretty wild.

We continued along the trees while I brushed aside thick desert moss and searched around the upthrust roots. I had no idea where the tomb was now, but I knew what to expect when I did find it! This mad Martian genie would blast me as callously as he had George Manning. *Bring him in close!* the thought hammered at me. *Your only chance...make a try for the blaster...*

"I think I've found it," I said. "There's something over here—"

He came forward. I straightened suddenly and grabbed for the gun-wrist. His speed was amazing. He leaped a pace to the right, brought the blaster up and fired. The charge tore past my ear. I staggered back, clutched at the overhead branches... and my feet plunged through some sort of rotten planking.

I'd found the tomb, all right. I was standing in it to my hips.

"I could have put that charge right

through you, Vaughn...but I have further plans for you!"

A chill came over me as I realized what Klaeg meant. He intended to work on me with that reverse-thalamic ray, in order to judge its affect on Terran metabolism!

"All right, Vaughn. Climb out of there and start tearing those boards away!"

I was feeling tired now, a terrible weakness was on me, but the boards came away easily. On some long-forgotten day a man had died, and other men had built him a ramshackle tomb, and no one had approached the sepulchre for years. It was very black inside except for a moonbeam slanting through the open roof. I could see a muddy head, without hair or flesh, but with teeth, that seemed to grin a greeting at me. I'd seen that skull before. That's where I'd put the E-Beam packet—beside the alien skull.

"It must be there," Klaeg snarled. "Drag it out!"

"Not me, Doc!" I drew back a little, tried to make my voice scared. "It's here all right. You get it out if you want. There's—there's a nest of *libulas* in here!"

I heard him give an oath, felt him press forward. This was the moment! I brought the heavy chunk of wood in my hand up and back, in a single swift arc. It crashed squarely against his teeth. I was whirling as he stumbled back, and then I pounced upon him. I got hold of his gun-wrist and jerked it sharply against my knee. He let out a yell and dropped the gun.

KLAEG was squirming like an *ocelan*, bringing his knees up into my groin. I felt fainter every moment. I let go of the wrist and tried to find the blaster. Klaeg smashed a fist into my face.

"I'll kill you, Earthman! I've got to kill you!" He kept yelling that, and froth was on his lips. Then he yelled, "Dhaarj! Dhaarj!" I got a hand around his throat and he didn't yell any more. But I heard the sound of heavy steps coming down the slope of the ravine! The Jovian! That's when the real panic hit me and I knew I had to get the *kra* blaster.

I fumbled and found the blaster. Klaeg brought a knee into my stomach and I felt sick. I couldn't get the weapon around. Klaeg had hold of my wrist and was bending it backward. I thought: *Dhaarj is coming! If I don't—*

We twisted and rolled and Klaeg was trying with both hands for the weapon. I held onto the weapon. Klaeg was using his knees to keep me down and I kept getting weaker. Klaeg was making noises in his throat and he seemed big and heavy. He kept coming forward until he got a knee against my throat. I thought: *the Jovian's at the first tree now—*

Klaeg pressed with his knee and my head went back. My throat was hurting and blocking the air. The knee pressed harder, and it was bad. Then it was very bad. But I wouldn't let go of the blaster: *The Jovian will be here! I've got to—*

The pain in my throat was a long tube. It went up to my eyes and down to my stomach. It twirled and kept twirling. My stomach was glossy and purple. My brain was black and burning. Klaeg didn't care about the blaster now, he was trying to kill me with his knee in my throat! Slowly, I managed to move my hand. It twisted and brought up the blaster and my fingers touched a tiny stud. It was too late to wonder which way it was pointing. My finger pressed the stud.

There came a burst of heat that

sprayed back upon me. Then a smell of burning flesh, a shuddering scream from Klaeg. Abruptly the screaming stopped. The pressure in my throat went away. I rolled his body aside and tried to stand up. Dhaarj was coming, and I was so weak I could hardly stand, but I had the blaster!

I twisted around and saw Dhaarj. His big shape rushed at me as I raised the blaster. A hand darted out and clamped my wrist. He blocked two of my punches, and he was yelling something, and then I was too weak to move as he held me at arm's length and took the gun.

CHAPTER VI

ANOTHER sound brought me around. Duura was there, staring down at Klaeg's charred body. She looked from Klaeg to the weapon in the Jovian's hand.

"So you killed him, Dhaarj! He always said you might try a double-cross!" Something of doubt rose in her shadowed eyes, and then she shrugged. Her lips looked garish the way I remembered in the photograph. She edged close to Dhaarj. "It's just as well, honey. We'll get rid of this Earthman, then you and I can go on with the plan! I have all of Klaeg's notes, I'm familiar with the thalamic-ray...there will be no stopping us! Khi-Ileth has the Rajecs ready to move when the time comes—"

Dhaarj was smiling at her strangely. "I'm afraid not, my dove. Zo far az the E-Beam iz concerned, I have other planz. But thankz for bringing me here. I have arrived in time."

Duura stared at him unbelievably, and without warning she brought up her hands and shoved. The Jovian went back and down as his feet tangled with a *taajos* root. He fired once, but the beam was wide of the

mark as Duura sped past me.

"Ztop her, Earthman!"

Without knowing why, I whirled and raced after her. She twisted through the trees toward the opposite ravine wall. By the time I reached there she was scrambling upward to the high desert. I followed, driven by the urgency in Dhaarj's voice and his pounding feet behind me.

Reaching the upper sands, I collapsed in a weary heap. Duura had reached the 'copter just a short distance away. I forced myself up, staggered toward it, and in the waning light of Phobos I could see the girl hunched over the control panel. There came a familiar humming sound together with an intersperse of static. Short-wave Telemagnum! Instantly I knew. She was contacting Khi-Ileth in the hills! I hurried forward, but Duura had seen me coming. The overhead rotors were in motion, the 'copter rose swiftly, poised for a single instant and then darted away.

I turned back and saw Dhaarj coming toward me across the sands. A look of ineffable sadness was on his gross face. It startled me.

"We have lozt, Earthman."

"We?"

"I am on your zide! Don't you realize that yet?"

It didn't make sense to me, and I kept my distance. Dhaarj went on: "Zhe iz vicious, that one! If pozzible, even worze than Klaeg! Now zhe will contact Khi-Ileth, and—"

"She's done that already," I told him.

"Yez. And look." He lifted a hand and pointed. Far off toward the ribbon of road I saw a puff of flame that quickly flared and died. "Zhe haz taken care of the three-wheeler, Dhaarj said. "We are completely cut off in the waztez, and when Khi-

Ileth bringz hiz men...." He paused, then shoved something at me; a dark-faced doll of heavy plastic, perhaps a foot and a half high. "Izn't it what you were after, in the tomb? The E-Beam model?"

I SNATCHED it from him. With trembling fingers I searched for the hidden mechanism. The doll swung apart, and I saw the maze of miniature tubes and coils and lenses. Purpose rose high and bright in my brain again! Without looking at Dhaarj, I whirled and plunged off into the wastes.

The Jovian came quickly after me. I felt steel in his fingers as he grabbed my shoulder.

"Uze your brainz, Earthman! You would never make it acrozz dezert—for many reazonz."

"I'm getting this through to Turi-bek! Nothing's going to stop me!"

"No, Earthman. There iz a better way. We have not lozt yet!" He was scanning the desert, off to the left by the ravines. "Come. I think I can zhow you!"

I hesitated, then followed. There was something strange and unpredictable about this man! As we walked, Dhaarj never once took his gaze from the gullies twisting below us. He seemed to be searching for something...and suddenly he was on his knees, scraping away sand and rubble at the bottom of a dune. "I knew it waz zomewhere cloze!" he said excitedly. "I could never forget!"

Soon I saw ancient stone, a sort of wall...part of a tunnel! I was helping him now, and the rubble came away fast. I'd heard of the place, vague rumors about an abandoned Canal that had been filled with slag from the Martian mines. But years ago pirates had conceived the idea of

burrowing through it, making a perfect retreat to the desert!

"It leadz to the outzkirtz of L'Ottli." Dhaarj was grinning at me. "We zhall return there! The element of the unpredictable; they will not be expecting uz!"

We pushed through a door of decaying wood, and Dhaarj produced a torch which he flashed about. The walls were a glaze of hardened glass where the heat beams had burrowed. And then Dhaarj sprang forward.

"Luck iz with uz, Earthman!!" He was staring at a group of little cars, ore-cars long abandoned.

"Atomic? Hold that light steady!" I came forward and studied the controls. They were outdated, but in this dry atmosphere metal did not corrode; everything seemed intact. I twisted the rheostats. There came a sluggish burst of power, an ascending whine as the rear motors took hold.

Seconds later we were on the way, as Dhaarj kept the torch centered to shatter the darkness.

"TEN MILEZ, Earthman. We zhould be at L'Ottli zoon!"

"And no doubt Khi-Ileth is there already. I know Duura was contacting him." I glanced at the Jovian. "Why are you doing this, Dhaarj? If you were playing on my team, you could have come in a hell of a lot sooner!"

"Wrong, Earthman. I could not—az you zay—tip my hand. I had to wait my time. And jutz like Klaeg, I had to be zure you remembered!"

"So you could grab the E-Beam for yourself—or whoever you're working for!" I peered through the gloom. "Jovian Government?"

"Wrong again, Earthman. I'm an outcazt."

"Don't keep calling me Earthman. My name's Vaughn."

"Who'z arguing?"

There was silence, and my hand tightened around the plastic doll on the seat. I pondered. Here we were heading straight back to L'Ottli, and for all I knew I might be playing right into Dhaarj's hands.

"You have the E-Beam, Vaughn. But promise me thiz: If worst comes to worst—deztroy it! Such a weapon muzt not fall into wrong handz!"

I'd already made up my mind to that. Something in the Jovian's voice puzzled me. Everything about him was a contradiction.

"And if you ztill do not truzt me—here!" He took the blaster from his belt, slid it across the seat to me.

For the barest moment I hesitated.

"Keep it," I said. "We'll probably need it, and if I've made another mistake it won't matter anyway!"

"Thankz, Vaughn." In the dark I felt that he was grinning.

The tunnel continued straight as a rule, but soon we were on a slight upward grade. I cut down the speed. "Az I remember it," Dhaarj said, "thiz leadz out at the far edge of town—"

"And then?" I had my own ideas, but I wanted to hear his.

"My plan would be thiz, Vaughn. Firzt we make our way over to Klaeg'z laboratory. We'll find a Tele-Magnum there. It'z a huge one, powerful enough to get a mezzage through to Turibek. Our only chanze iz to get the Zpecialz over here!"

I nodded, but one idea went clamoring in my head. If Dhaarj was so anxious for the Specials, why hadn't he contacted them twenty-four hours ago? He must have had plenty of opportunity. But I kept my thoughts to myself.

"We'll try it," I said grimly. "Keep that blaster handy."

THE PASSAGE ended abruptly.

We left the car, moved past stone abutments and thence onto a rocky incline just behind the ghost-town. It was that deepening hour before dawn; Phobos hung low and Deimos had disappeared. Dimly we could see the ruins stretching below...and we saw more. The Rajecs were there! The black spacer was there, with a desperate activity going on about it. I caught a glimpse of Duura, scurrying, giving orders. And the towering figure of Khi-Ileth urging his men on as they carried equipment into the spacer.

"Moving!" I whispered. "They're moving to Khi-Ileth's stronghold in the hills."

"Wait." Dhaarj touched my arm. He peered intently. "They will never leave yet. Khi-Ileth haz men zcouring the dezert for uz...he will not expect uz here! We muzt act quickly!"

I pointed. "If we circle to the far side—"

It was too late. A line of shadowy figures loomed on the slope below. Rajec guards! I could see their feral eyes and flowing green hair. The way they came leaping upward, I knew they had spotted us. A few of them held Energasts.

"Keep back!" Dhaarj crouched beside me in the entrance. The Rajecs came upward like silent ghosts. An Energast spoke inaudibly. We felt the shock of it through the stone mere yards away. Light limned the scene for a split second...and Dhaarj leaped into view, a gigantic figure. The sheer audacity of it held them. Dhaarj had the blaster in action, moving in a single wide swath. I saw three Rajecs go down. A fourth one fled pellmell, but the last one came on, trying to swing his Energast into position. The blaster charge

caught him squarely, and he went down in a smouldering heap.

"We're in for it!" Dhaarj turned quickly and his face was tragic. Then I saw his cause for alarm. The Rajecs below had caught flashes of the brief skirmish. Dozens of them were gathering. Others dashed for the spacer, to emerge with more weapons as Khi-Ileth gave swift orders.

"No retreat now," Dhaarj said desperately. "If they concentrate those weaponz they will collapse the tunnel around uz!" But I paid him no heed, as I hurried back to the heavy ore-car and brought it wheeling to the entrance.

"Quick! Give me a hand with this! We'll have a barricade...." We swung it across the entrance, as the first tentative attack came. A few of the bolts struck close. The car shuddered in front of us but the heavy metal held. Dhaarj returned the fire, but only for a moment.

"Range iz too far!" he raged helplessly. He crouched, waiting, blaster held in readiness. I ventured a look. They were coming slowly, spread out in a fan-like maneuver across the slope. For a moment the strategy puzzled me...and then suddenly I knew! I had the E-Beam. Duura knew it, Khi-Ileth knew it. They wanted that Beam, they needed it, they had risked everything. Now they did not dare launch a crushing attack which might destroy it! They had us pinned down and would try to pick us off neatly.

The E-Beam! An idea leaped high and bright in my brain. It was only a model, scarcely more than a toy, but it might work! All I lacked was a Power feed...and the ore-car was atomic! I hurried to the rear motors, pried away at the metal encasement. The lid fell away. I searched the dark interior. These old type mo-

tors, I knew, were equipped with atomic powerpacks....

There came the *thut* of Dhaarj's blaster as he opened up again.

"They're trying to flank uz" he called. "I can hold them for a while! Hurry!" He slid the electric torch to me.

I found the powerpack, a thin brick encased in duralloy. Gently I disengaged the leads to the motor; then opening the plastic doll, I stared at the E-Beam accoutrement. I had heard mere rumors of the working principle. Parts of the maze I recognized, but the rest was beyond my ken! A hard dismay washed over me.

Far back in the tunnel came a shattering roar, a swirl of dust and debris. Some of the Rajecs must have gotten past Dhaarj to blast from above! Our retreat was cut off.

Desperation lent wings to my fingers as I sought out the proper coils and terminals. I was none too sure, but I thought I had a glimmering of it! Stretching out the powerpack leads, I fastened them tight beneath a series of contact discs. I was working it blind. A chance in a hundred! Trailing the leads behind me, I hurried over to Dhaarj. He was reeling, near collapse. Then I felt it—a wash of power across my brain that sent me staggering. Dhaarj gasped, "They've zet up a parala-converter!..."

I GLIMPSED it far on the slope below. A tripod weapon with pale, fanning rays reaching out, washing up to us almost gently. A cortical paralysis blanket! I felt it clutching at my brain. With my last strength I brought the E-Beam waist high, aimed through an opening and released the power. The weapon leaped in my hands like a thing alive...and

then all was incredible chaos.

But the chaos was below us! The pencil-thin E-Beam, pale blue and shot through with streaks of silver, leaped unerringly to the mark. The parala-converter vanished in a wash of flame, taking half a dozen Rajecs with it. And the Beam didn't end! It lanced on interminably, boring through the nearest building and the one beyond. Everything it touched blazed out into fire. The Beam propagated upon itself, stripping electrons from a certain radius and drawing them inward along the direction of flight!

I glanced at Dhaarj; even he was shaken at the display of Earth's greatest weapon, and this was but a model. The Rajecs were scattering in panic. I saw Khi-Ileth shouting orders, as with a handful of men he raced toward the haven of the black spacer. Before I could redirect the Beam, they had reached the lock and tumbled inside.

The grips were growing warm in my hands, but I swept the Beam across the black hull. Nothing happened there! The spacer was tough, probably allotropic metal. I clicked off the Beam.

"If they lift gravz, we're finizhed! They'll try to blazt uz out now." Dhaarj came erect. "We've got to get clozer...we'll uze the car!"

"Motors won't work. I'm using the powerpack!"

"But it will roll," the Jovian grinned at me. He was putting his strength to the task, swinging the heavy car around toward the slope. "Get in! Be ready with that Beam!"

He shoved. The wheels took hold, and he leaped in beside me. Like a Juggernaut we gathered momentum. Again I played the Beam in a criss-cross of shattering fire against the spacer. Slowly the hull suffused with

dull red, grew brighter, but the metal held. And now the remaining Rajecs were trying to intercept us. They converged from all sides of the slope, green hair flowing in the dawn light, yellow eyes hate-filled and fanatic.

The very silence of the attack made it the more terrible. No yells, no screams of pain as they died. For Dhaarj was using the blaster now with devastating result. One Energast bolt caught us at the bottom of the slope, sent the car slewing to a halt fifty yards from the spacer.

Again the Beam was growing hot in my hands. I felt that the coils were melting under the overload. And now we were drawing fire from the spacer, as Energasts lashed out at us. Simultaneously there came a roar of power, a backwash from the tubes. Khi-Ileth was lifting gravs!

A bolt struck the car, washing over the edge where I crouched. A spiral of nausea tore at me. I felt myself going out. The Beam slipped from my blistered hands....

Dhaarj snatched it from me. Half stunned, I saw him tearing away his shirt, wrapping it around the hot Beam grips. He aimed...and livid hell broke loose. A solid, smashing explosion that rocked the desert. Our heavy car went spinning like a toy. Fire and flaming metal hurled about us. Fragments of the black spacer caromed into space and through the buildings of L'Ottli.

Dhaarj had aimed directly into the rocket wash, and the chain reaction had carried through the tubes!

Dazedly, I came to my feet some distance away. The terrain was a blanket of flame and molten metal. A few remaining Rajecs fled toward the upper desert. I saw Dhaarj, the E-Beam a tangled ruin in his fist; he clutched at one arm as he tottered and seemed about to go down.

I hurried toward him, then suddenly stopped as I saw Duura! Apparently she had taken refuge between buildings during the battle. Now she raced through the flaming debris, and I sped after her as she headed toward a far building that I recognized as the laboratory....

ONE ENTIRE side was aflame, but she had already disappeared within. I followed. I could make out her figure hurrying far ahead through the corridors. A wall collapsed but she fought her way through it. For a minute I lost sight of her.

Flames reached behind me, and the age-old walls shuddered with ominous vibrations. Then I saw her again, hurrying into a low-arched room at the rear. I reached the doorway in time to hear a shatter of sound, and then I saw her, standing by the towering Tele-Magnum, smashing it to ruin with a heavy metal bar.

"That doesn't matter now, Duura! The Specials will be here."

The bar clattered to the floor, she whirled to face me. Her begrimed features were a tight mask of hate. Her eyes were bottomless pools and colorless...a madwoman's eyes. As she fell back against a table, one hand clutched at a square metal case. And I knew why she had come here. That case held all of the data on Klaeg's reverse-thalamics.

"You haven't won, Earthman! There are others who are interested, and *this* shall go on! There will be other times...and ways. Neither you nor the Specials will stop me!"

"You'll fry on Bedril's torture plates," I told her.

"Bedril!" she spat the word. "I hate him and all of his superior kind. As for you—"

I took a step forward. "Place your-

self in my custody. I can guarantee that from Earth Government, at least, you'll receive less than death."

"You're in no position to guarantee! I'm glad you followed me here, Earthman...for it is you who shall die!" Without warning, she brought her left hand around. It held an Energast.

I hurled myself forward in the same instant she fired. One edge of the bolt caught me, sent me spinning into the wall where I crumpled. It seemed an eternity as I came tottering to my feet. Duura was gone. Heat seared the room, and a section of roof sagged dangerously. I staggered into the corridor and made it to the one remaining exit at the rear.

I saw her then, hurrying toward the 'copter...and I saw something else. From a shattered side of the building poured a group of creatures I had observed some time before in the lower corridor! Subjects of the ghastly thalamic experiment!

Duura spied them too, and in the leaping flames she must have seen the hate in their eyes. These had once been Martians. Perhaps they remembered. Duura had only time to whirl and fire once before they were upon her. She went down beneath their claw-like hands. There was scarcely a sound, and I was grateful for that. It was all over before I could move.

When I looked again, they were moving through the ruins with animal-like gaits, making their way toward open desert.

SOME MINUTES later I found Dhaarj. He was searching the ruins for me, although his right arm dangled limply, shredded and horribly burned. I knew he would never use that arm again. Through a grimace of pain he handed me what was

left of the E-Beam.

"Nize toy." He managed a grin, and stared around at the remnants of L'Ottli. "I would hate to zee the real thing in action."

"I hope you never will," I said grimly, and went to work bandaging his arm. "While we're on the subject, why did you double-cross Klaeg and Duura? What made you throw in with me?"

"How the hell zhould I know?" He looked away.

"Better tell me now."

The Jovian shrugged. "Klaeg zaid he could get the E-Beam. That'z az much az I know. I planned to double-crozz him...and dizpoze of it at Cerez Baze."

"The pirate stronghold!" I exclaimed.

"Yez. I told you I waz outcazt. Iz not right that one planet zhould have

zuch a weapon—even Earth." He looked at me long and hard. "But Klaeg had not zaid you were bringing it to an Interplanet Council, that each planet would have it in future. When I learned of *this*" —he shrugged— "I changed my planz. That way iz best."

I nodded agreement, then came quickly alert as the sound of motors reached us. We had scarcely been aware that dawn was here. From the direction of Turibek came a host of 'copters, heading straight for L'Ottli.

"My authority takes precedence," I said quickly. "I extend to you the protection of Earth. Perhaps complete amnesty when DeHarries hears my story! I promise nothing...but I'll do my best."

"Thankz, Vaughn. I accept, and I will take my chanzez."

THE END

THE LINK

BY

SALEM LANE

THE FEVERISH-EYED image in the video viewer gesticulated wildly.

"Jan! You've got to come over! I've done it! I've got it!"

"Take it easy Renton," the other remonstrated. "Tell me, what is it?"

"I can't talk over the video," Renton answered, a little less agitatedly. "But I must see you," he insisted.

"All right, all right. I'll be there in ten minutes."

Jan stepped from the autocab and hurried into the low gray building that was Renton's laboratory. He was met at the door by his excited friend.

Before Jan could get his coat off, Renton was at him.

"First of all, not a word! This is the biggest thing ever!"

Jan extricated himself from the sweeping cloak-coat and settled himself comfortably, lighting a cigarette and leaning back. "O.K. What's the pitch?"

With an obvious effort Renton calmed himself. He forced himself to take a low chair opposite Jan. He started to talk and as he went on his voice settled more firmly into a grave and scientific tone.

"I've made a thought-cell, Jan. A real honest-to-God thought-cell! Do you know what that means?"

"No, I don't," Jan answered. "Take it from the beginning."

"Well, you know what a photo-cell is. You know what a thermostat is. You know what a detector is."

Jan nodded.

"A photo-cell is sensitive to light, a thermostat to heat, and a detector to electromagnetic radiation. That is, you can get physical movement or electrical currents from these things."

"You mean..." Jan sat bolt upright.

"Yes," Renton said flatly, "I mean just that. I've made a thought cell. Essentially it's a simple detector of thought. Come into the lab and I'll make your eyes pop."

They went into the sanctum sanctorum, and amidst the equipment-littered benches stood one whose surface was free save for a small gadget which looked like a radio chassis or a TV chassis, and a lone twenty-five watt electric light bulb connected to it by a pair of wires. A cord led to an electric outlet.

"Look it over," Renton commanded.

Jan examined the equipment carefully.

So far as he could see, there was a conventional radio or video power supply for generating D.C. from the A.C. lines. The light bulb of course was obvious. But a small unfamiliar-looking tube stood mounted beside the rectifier.

Renton watched Jan's eyes survey the equipment. "Looks simple, eh?" he asked. "Well, it is simple. There's nothing to it, except that it's going to change the history of the world!"

"I'll bite," Jan said. "Give me the story." "First a demonstration. Watch this." Renton played with the machine. "I'll just connect the power line through this switch—then watch!"

As good as his word, Renton closed the power-line switch. Nothing happened for a moment. Then the light bulb went on suddenly. Then it blinked off. Then on and off.

"All right," Renton said, "you try it. Just think the light on or off and see what happens. I'll stop thinking about it."

Jan did as he was told. He simply thought of the light being on. Then off. Then blinking fast. Then slow.

He turned to Renton and grabbed his hand. "Renton," he said solemnly, "if this

is a gag, it's not funny. If it isn't accept my sincerest congratulations. It is tremendous!"

"It's the truth, Jan," Renton said calmly. "I've built that damn cell within the tube. I'll give you the details even though I don't know how it works myself. All I know is that it's sensitive to human thought. I mean, when I think of 'on' it'll go on. And vice versa. Also I can change it back and forth. That's all it will do. But imagine what can be created with this. Here is the first real robot!"

Jan gazed at his inventor-friend for a long time. "Renton," he said, "this can be one of the greatest things ever to happen, or it can be one of the most terrible. Please play it straight, whatever you do."

The two men said nothing more but watched while the bulb went on and off and Renton's direction. And in the brilliant light of the laboratory, the blinking of the thought-cell seemed to be like the closing and opening of some monstrous Cyclops who held the destiny of Man within the gaze of his baleful eye!

"Dear God..." began Jan, in his mind...

* * *

THE TERRIBLE DECADE

BY STANLEY ABBOTT

HISTORIANS, in looking back on the history of Man, cannot too strongly emphasize that period in which he seemed about to destroy himself. The fearful decade, 2002—2012, now is just a scar on Man's memory, though the physical results of that period have not fully been reckoned. "Decade of Death" it has been called, nor is that an extraordinary or deceptive title.

As we all know the "Decade of Death" began with Man's noblest exploit—his escape into space. The famous *Rocketeer III* with its seven-man crew arose from that barren Arizona field, landed on the Moon and returned. With what pride and power it filled men and within three years the first of the "satellite ships" was located in its orbit around the Earth.

The newscasters and videomen of the time were fond of referring to these floating satellites as "astronomical observatories" when in reality they were agents for war and nothing else. All this was a preliminary however. In these years, the satellites, a dozen of them, each belonging to an intensely nationalistic nation, including that of the Americas, became a gigantic fortress laden with but one cargo—atomic bombs.

The beryllium reaction, its fission, made atomic bombs the property of anyone. There was no lack of them.

It has never been determined just what triggered off the dreadful holocaust. Some researchers tend to believe that it was

purely accidental. It is said that a rocket torpedo whose warhead was an atomic bomb, was launched purely by the mistaken signals of a radar technician. Regardless of the cause, when it destroyed Paris in one unbelievable blast, that was the signal for retaliation and within thirty minutes after the first rocket had landed on that fair city the surface of the Earth was being pocked gigantically and regularly by the greatest agents of Man's fiendish powers. Even now we see evidence of the intensity of the Armageddon. Gaping craters that once were cities, still have not been restored to use.

The hundreds of millions who perished in that war, the hundreds of cities which ceased to exist, still haunt our dreams. We know that it can never happen again. The Council will see to that.

But we can't erase the memory and the mute remains. In a way they are the best monument. When we 'coptor by the hulk that once was Chicago, when we see the Geiger needle climbing and hear the counter clicking, we know that we are the inheritors of a trust that must never be violated.

Yes, when the decade ended in '12 for lack of industry and combatants, and the Joiners formed the Council, we were witnesses of a new Era in the Age of Man. So long as we avoid the forces which led to that ghastly slaughter, we may hope that the Earth will not be left as a vast tomb of Mankind.

The Pranksters



The laughing voice of a child filled Hitler's ears — and yet he knew he was alone in the room . . .

by Rog Phillips

Can the course of history be changed by a practical joke? Two boys from the future experimented with their "toys" to find out!

"MY DEAR Martia," the matronly woman gushed. "You simply must drop in on us for the weekend. We have a delightful place just outside old Berlin in the early twentieth century."

"Thank you so much," Martia answered, her worried young face lighting up with pleasure. "You—you don't mind if I bring my two boys, Johny and Georgey, do you Mrs. Opdenner?" She waited anxiously for the affect of this.

Mrs. Opdenner looked doubtful for a brief second, then noticed the anxiety on Martia's face and relented gracefully.

"Of course not, my dear," she gushed—thereby proving herself a trueblue character, for she had heard of Martia's two sons. "You won't have any trouble finding the place. We have one of the latest time-beacons. It will bring you in safely if you hit anywhere within fifty years of the place. You can find the

code number in the phone book. I must be going now. Please make it soon, Martia darling."



Martia watched her depart down the aisles of the yard goods section of the store, with a look of dreamy contemplation in her eyes. It would be wonderful to spend a weekend in old Europe, back in the days of almost prehistory. 6995 A.D. was a long ways from the early twentieth century. Only the rich could live that far back, because it took too long to commute if one had to come back to 6995 every day.

Then, with a nervous glance at her watch, she went on with her shopping. An hour later she left the store and went to the roof parking lot. Her car was a semi-wreck sandwiched in between two gleaming ones. In fact, all the cars were nicer than hers. It worked, though, she told herself, and that was all that really counted. With the boys, one ten and the other twelve, it was much more practical to have an old car that they could play with.

In her own secret heart Martia was very proud of her two sons. They were, she thought, budding genuises. They had had the car apart more than once. In fact, she had learned the necessity of informing them ahead of time when she wanted to use it, so they could have it together for her.

She slipped behind the control panel. There were gadgets there that didn't belong there—gadgets that her two sons had solemnly warned her not to touch. There were also several extra hyper-units way back under the hood that didn't cut in with the others from the regular controls. But so long as the boys kept the car working as it should, she didn't mind what they did to it.

Slipping the degrav switch to minus one and four tenths she rose slowly until she was a hundred feet in the air. Then she cut it back to

minus one and used the gyro to switch the nose around to 340 degrees. With long practice she next cut in the forward accelerator to thirty, and the time speed to seven years per hour. That combination would bring her close to home in twenty minutes.

During the twenty minutes she sat back and made the plans for the coming outing. Maybe John could come with them if he didn't have to work at the office. There was never any way of knowing until the last minute.

The time switch threw the ship out of time travel, leaving the space speed going. Martia felt an inner glow satisfaction at having hit it so closely. She touched the vernier-control until the scene below was solid, then guided the car over housetops until her own came into view.

She landed in the driveway, picked up her bundles, and went across the lawn into the house. It was a modest fourteen room bungalow resting in the space, the very same space, the real estate man had sworn, as the palace of one of the movie moguls of the city. Only his was in real time. Only the rich could afford to live in real time, what with factories and businesses taking up four fifths of the real world.

The working classes and semi-rich had to take residence in the world of imaginary reality—though how it was imaginary Martia had never been able to understand, since everything in it was just as solid and real to anyone in it as the so-called real world was when you were in it.

It had something to do with the square root of minus one which was definitely an imaginary number, and something to do with that number tying in phases of matter, and matter not in phase with other matter

being able to occupy the same space independently in a way like neither existed relative to the existence of the other.

It was dangerous in some ways, too. You could materialize right in the same space as something and blow it and yourself up. But that was nearly eliminated now with the advance warning lights that somehow managed to spray light from the space location you were about to enter so that anyone there could get out of the way. It was quite beautiful to see a light suddenly appear in empty air, followed in a brief moment by the materialization of a sleek, all-purpose car.

MARTIA laid her packages on a table and went to the door again, an eager anticipation in her manner.

"Johnny! Georgey!" she called.

Various noises from the direction of the yard back of the garage ceased abruptly. A gate popped open and two boys came charging toward the house.

"Hi mom," they called pleasantly. Then Georgey, slightly breathless, asked, "Did you get that pair of matched-frequency crystals I asked you to?"

"Oh dear," Martia said. "I was going to, but I met Mrs. Opdenner and forgot all about it. You'll understand when I tell you about it, though. Mrs. Opdenner is a very rich lady I used to know very well before you were born, and she has invited us for a weekend at her place."

"When and where is it?" Johnny asked suspiciously.

"You'll like it," Martia said. "It's in the early twentieth century, and just outside old Berlin, that German city that we bombed until it was in ruins during the second world war."

"Aw nuts," Georgey sulked. "I wisht it was where there's Indians. They were superstitious and we could have lots of fun with them."

"Well, you shouldn't," Martia said, trying to look severe. "It's against the law to try to affect the real world of the past—though," she frowned in vague bewilderment, "I don't see how it could be done. What's happened has happened, and can't be changed."

"Yeah, but the Indians would listen to us and think we were spirits from the happy hunting ground, with our new out-phase five-dimensional solenoid-crystal units—if you'd remembered to get them for us," Georgey said accusingly.

"I'll get them," Martia promised. "We won't be going until this weekend anyway. I do hope your father can come. He needs an outing."

"GREAT CAESAR'S ghost!" Martia's husband exclaimed. "What are you kids taking? It looks like a store to me!"

"Nothing much, pop," Georgey said nonchalantly. "Just two helicycles with the new time-dense blades and souped-up solenoid units in the time-travel motor. Heck, we gotta be able to get around a little. And an ultra-quick cooker with food packs, and a two pound power pile. And a couple of fifth-dimensional leakage resonators—"

"Where'd you get them?" his father asked. "I thought you had to have a license to get them."

"We didn't GET them, we MADE them," Johnny spoke up. "We found the instructions in an old T-T pocket book that we picked up in a second hand bookstore."

"And what's that thing?" the parent asked, pointing to a bulky, heavy looking object.

"That's a translator," Georgey said innocently.

"A translator? Oh?"

"Sure," Georgey said. "Maybe some of the old Germans are superstitious and we can have some fun."

"Everything but your chemical gadgets," John Blake Sr. remarked dryly. "Good thing I have to work this weekend. I'd have a full job keeping you kids out of trouble."

"Oh, we've got some chemical stuff too," Georgey said. "And also a couple of ionator jets to attach to our heli-cycles. We thought it would be a good idea to be ready for anything."

"Well, have a good time," John Sr. said fatalistically. "Bye darling." He kissed Martia tenderly.

"Call me if you can't find anything, John," Martia said.

"Let me drive, mom," Georgey said. "I can save us an hour of travel time with those souped-up auxiliary solenoids I added to the time travel motor."

"Well, I don't know..." Martia hesitated.

"Sure, let him," John Sr. said. "I have a lot of confidence in my sons."

He waved goodbye with one hand as the car rose gently, Georgey at the wheel, his mother beside him, and Johnny lost in the pile of stuff in the back seat; but his other hand was concealed behind his back, and two fingers of it were crossed.

A TIME beacon, in case the reader doesn't know, is simply a large red light placed within the hyper-spiral of an anchored time-bellows, which consists of two four-dimensional solenoid units, one of which acts as the anchor and hinge for the other, which alternately travels forward and backward in time to within the limits allowed it by its field

generation. Thus, anyone in view of the space where the time beacon is situated, and within fifty years of it, can see it.

Georgey had no trouble finding it. He simply turned his souped-up time-motor into full speed, and the space drives to half speed until he was over the geographical location of old Berlin—easily done because of the fifth-dimensional energy leakages that reveal normal objects as rather cloudy shapes in i-space, and then hovered stationary above the beacon until it became solid. At the same time the sprawling country estate of the Opdenners also materialized.

"Nineteen forty!" Johnny exclaimed, reading the date from the dashboard as Georgey shut off the degrav plates for a quick descent, then turned them to minus five g's within a hundred feet of the large parking area in back of the house.

There were no other cars there, though the open doors of the large garage showed the gleaming shapes of four of them, and space for several more.

"Should I put it in the garage, mom?" Georgey asked.

"Better leave it out until we're invited to put it inside," Martia said. She was looking anxiously toward the house. Her eyes lit up with relief as Mrs. Opdenner's portly shape came into view, convoyed by the lanky frame and dark suit of a servant. Martia waved cheerily, and Mrs. Opdenner waved back, descending on them with obvious hospitality.

"Martia darling," she gushed. "I'm so glad you came. And these are the two little DARlings." Her eyes mooned at Johnny and Georgey who stared at her without expression, noting the cold analysis the gushiness

concealed, and deciding they didn't like her.

"Johnny, Georgey, this is our hostess, Mrs. Opdenner, with whom I used to go to school," Martia said, oblivious to all undercurrents in her enjoyment of the prospect of a taste of how the rich lived. It cost a small fortune to transport two or three hundred tons of masonry, wood, plumbing, and supplies five thousand and fifty-five years into the past, and the hosts of skilled workers to put it all together.

"How do you dooo," Mrs. Opdenner hummed. "Such fine looking young men. Ah me, it's one of the crosses I have to bear that I never had any sons of my own."

The two boys squirmed uncomfortably, deciding to revise their first dislike a wee bit—to the extent of waiting and seeing.

"But come," Mrs. Opdenner said. "Jarvis, take their luggage. Martia, you and the boys must be tired after your long trip, the hours of sitting and waiting. I very seldom go up to the present any more."

"It didn't take very long," Martia said. "Only twenty minutes."

"Twenty minutes?" Mrs. Opdenner said, unbelieving. "But surely that can't be right."

"Sure," Johnny spoke up boldly. "We've got a souped-up time motor."

"Oh, souped-up, of course," Mrs. Opdenner said vaguely. "I must ask my husband to have one put on my own car."

"Better not," Georgey said coolly. "Unless you know how to handle it you're liable to go into a fifth dimensional tangent and wind up in the stratosphere before you know it. And unless you can gauge your temporal acceleration you're liable to black out."

"Really?" Mrs. Opdenner said.

From her expression she was dismissing the idea of getting a souped-up motor. Martia, glancing slyly at Georgey, realized that what he had said was just fantasy designed to discourage Mrs. Opdenner, and said nothing. She understood her boys, and through them all boys, with their jealousy and determination that the souped-up motor should remain their own special prerogative.

"Here we are," Mrs. Opdenner said lightly, leading the way into the large living room, big enough to be classed as an auditorium. "I'll have Virginia, my maid, show you your rooms. When you come back down we can have some refreshment."

"GEE, 1940," Johnny whispered to Georgey in the privacy of their room. "That's when the Germans were trying to conquer the world, isn't it?"

"Sure," Georgey said. "All around us are soldiers and guns and airplanes, and scientists working in secret laboratories, and mad doctors cutting up live people, and concentration camps where people are murdered by the thousands."

"Wish we could stop the war," Johnny said seriously.

"You know we can't," Georgey said disgustedly. "If we could, history would say that it was mysteriously stopped. But we can sure go around and see what's going on!"

"And maybe find somebody superstitious enough to pay attention to us, I hope," Johnny said, a malicious anticipation in his eyes at the memory of similar escapades of the past.

Jarvis came in loaded down with their myriad articles and let them slip to the floor with a sigh of relief.

"There you are, boys," he said.

"You know — " He looked nervously toward the door to make sure Mrs. Opdenner wasn't there—"from the looks of this stuff you must be planning on doing a few things. I've always had a hankering to look in on the past around here. If you find something interesting I would appreciate it if you'd show it to me. That is, if I can get away from my duties long enough."

Johnny and Georgey looked at each other mysteriously.

"How would you like to see—Hitler?" Georgey asked in a hoarse whisper.

"Hitler?" Jarvis echoed. "That would suit me fine. If you can find him let me know."

He glanced at the door again nervously and hurried out, darting the boys an encouraging smile as he left.

"Gee, do you think we can find Hitler?" Johnny asked after Jarvis had gone.

"Why not?" Georgey said.

"If we could get him bumped off that would end the war," Johnny said.

"You can't do it!" Georgey said disgustedly. "Can't you get it through your head that you can't change hings like that? Hitler will live until 1945, then commit suicide."

"I'll bet you my share in the matched crystals against yours that we can," Johnny said firmly. "I listened to the spool by Hobson a few days ago, and he says that it may be possible to alter history and that one of these days it may come about."

"Unknown history, yes," Georgey admitted. "But you can't alter the facts of known history. Correy is pretty generally accepted as final on time relations, and his theory is that—"

"I know what his theory is,"

Johnny said irritably. "It says that all you can do is alter known things into new, self-adjusting paterns that come out the same. But Hobson says the day will come when that theory is exploded by some major change—and I'll bet we can make that major change—by getting Hitler bumped off this year. We have a whole weekend to try it. Are you game?"

"Sure," Georgey agreed. "We better get busy and look him up though."

"After we go to bed tonight," Johnny said. "Mom won't suspect, and Mrs. Opdenner will think we little darlings will be sound asleep in our little beddies with our toys in our innocent little arms."

"Huh!" Georgey snorted. "Grown-ups give me a pain. They think the age of reason doesn't start until you reach their age. Except mom and pop," he added graciously.

"HURRY UP and get that transistor hooked into the circuit," Johnny ordered in a hoarse whisper. "We'll have to have our lights out pretty soon or mom will come in and make us—and we can't get ready in the dark."

"I'm doing it as fast as I can," Georgey said. "Just see that you get the mounting bolted onto the coptors right so it will work."

"Got it," Johnny said triumphantly standing back from his work.

"So've I," Georgey said. "Help me pick this up and put it in place."

They worked swiftly, and finished just as their mother knocked softly on the door.

"Boys," she said softly through the door. "Lights out. Time to get to sleep."

"O.K., mom," they said patiently. Johnny went over to the door and switched off the lights.

Several moments later there was a silent whirring as the helicopter blades lifted the helicycles. This vanished as the time-motors took them far enough into the past to escape from the room.

"Now lets go back to when we were," Georgey said. "Just in case something goes wrong. Get up above the time beacon."

It consumed ten minutes to make it from inside their room to outside at the beacon. Reality in all time lines travels at a constant rate, the same way light does. A fraction of a second either way from the "now" of a stream of reality makes it vanish or become shadowy. Thus, the ten minutes consumed couldn't be made up. It took ten minutes, and the house and time beacon weren't solid except ten minutes from the instant of their departure from their room.

"Let's stick close together," Georgey ordered tensely. "We might run into trouble. And let's go right down town in Berlin and start from there."

THE STREETS of Berlin showed neither light nor dark. Objects were visible in *i*-space solely by their energy-leakage, which took place on the sub-space level without relation to the amount of light or lack of it visible in real space.

Johny and Georgey guided their helicycles along, through people and through all obstacles, knowing from long practice that it didn't matter.

People with minds sensitive to subspace energies might have sensed their presence if they concentrated, but that was not likely.

They had their out-phase crystal-solenoid circuit working under full power. It brought to them the faint murmur of the sounds around them.

and also the full-voiced translations from the translator.

The translator was so perfect that it isolated the various voices, translated them, and brought the conversations in a jumble of simultaneous voices just as it received them, only in English.

Johny and Georgey moved here and there, pausing to listen in to this person and that one. After an hour of such aimless wandering they noticed a woman dressed in a long black skirt hurrying down the street by herself.

She seemed intent on getting somewhere.

"Let's see what she's up to," Georgey said. "We can adjust the crystals for encephalographic pickup and maybe get some of her thoughts."

"O.K.," Johny agreed.

"Boy, is this luck," Georgey murmured as the woman's thoughts came in, fragmentary, disjointed, but picturesque. "She's on her way to an interview with Hitler himself."

"I'm worried," came the voice of the translator, picking up the woman's thoughts in German and translating them into English. "Maybe he'll be in one of his moods tonight. Or maybe the victories today will make him happy. Oh, it's such a tight line I walk on. The least step and I'll meet his wrath and see some horrible fate descend on me. I wish I had never smiled at him. I wish I had been ill and in bed that day he first saw me. But I must go on, playing things his way, letting him whistle the tune."

"I'm going to try something," Johny whispered excitedly. "Listen." He switched the translator to sending, and spoke into it. "And trying to save your skin while he conquers the whole world and puts it in slav-

cry," he said in a ghostly voice.

"What?" The woman looked around, startled. "What was that?" Johnny flicked the switch to get her voice, then back again to sending.

"On edge," he said. "But you know what you should do. He loves you, has faith in you—"

"Now why did I say he loves her?" he said, looking at Georgey with amazement, flicking the switch to receive so his voice wouldn't carry to the woman.

"Loves me, yes," the woman thought. "Me. Eva Braun. But he wouldn't listen to me in big affairs—or would he?"

"Of course he would," Johnny said. "You could pretend you are able to see the future. He falls for stuff like that, and how do you know? Maybe you CAN see the future? Maybe it could be arranged."

"Oh, if I only could," Eva Braun thought. "If there were only some way to keep him from taking England—as he surely will in the next few days. Already his troops are lining up and getting prepared to cross the channel."

"Tell him he will be defeated if he does."

"But he wouldn't believe that," Eva said. "And he might suspect me of being against him. He suspects everyone of being against him if they don't agree with him on everything."

"But we will help you," Johnny said earnestly. "We'll make him feel that you are telling the truth."

"We?" Eva said. "But of course that was just a slip. I'm so frenzied I imagine my own thoughts are talking to me like another person."

Johnny shut off the translator in a hurry.

"She almost suspected, then," Georgey accused. "You ought to be

more careful in what you say."

"I suppose you would have done better," Johnny snorted. "Anyway, it did some good. Now she'll think maybe some spirits were talking to her, and if she's superstitious she'll believe more easily, because people in these days believed that spirits were real stuff. Anything they said was better than anything a living person could say. Hitler was that way—say! I'll bet we could have some fun with that guy. He'd think we were spirits and maybe we could make him do something to wreck his whole war."

"We'll try it out when Eva gets there," Georgey said. "Only this time it's my turn."

"EVA MY darling," Hitler said. "It's so good to have you come tonight. That bloated Goering has been disagreeing with me again. I'd have him shot, but the aviators swear by him, and I'm afraid of what might happen."

"There's your chance," Georgey said to Eva through the translator hastily. "Tell him you have great fears."

"Oh, Adolph," Eva said tenderly. "I, too, wish something could be done. Have I told you? The spirits sometimes talk to me, and on the way here they were whispering to me that I must tell you things."

"What things?" Hitler asked suspiciously.

"Tell him Goering wants to betray him and head the new government," Georgey said.

"This hasty attempt to invade England," Eva said. "The spirits tell me it's a scheme of Goering's to get your armies defeated, so he can head a new Germany."

"How?" Hitler asked eagerly. "I already have my staff of mediums

who continually cast horoscopes and consult the spirits. They say nothing about possible defeat. They speak only of victory after victory, with final triumph. They say we can take England now, even in spite of her air strength. They say on land England is too weak to resist even a force of ten thousand troops with full equipment."

"Tell him their advice is false," Georgy whispered. Then to Johny, "Isn't this exciting? Of course he never invades England, and all this isn't changing anything; but it gets me, makes me feel like maybe he would if we didn't talk him out of it."

"I love you, Adolph, darling," Eva said. "I have no desire but for you to succeed because I have no interest in the world outside of you. The spirits that talk to me say that your spiritualists lie because they don't know, and must make up something to save their skins. They say you will lose if you try to invade England."

"If they would only speak to me," Hitler said. Then he became petulant. "It's strange," he added. "That I, who am the Leader, should have to get the guidance from the higher forces through others. Why can't the spirits talk to ME?"

"Maybe they could—if you would listen," Eva said.

"How do they sound?" Adolph asked eagerly. "I'd like to know how to listen. Maybe they talk to me all the time and I don't realize it!"

"They sound very much like your own thoughts," Eva said truthfully. "In fact, when I first heard them I looked around, thinking someone behind me must be saying something, but no one was near enough to talk to me."

"My turn now," Johny said. "Let

me talk to him."

"O.K.," Georgy said reluctantly, relinquishing the microphone.

"Tell him to be quiet and we will talk to him," he said to Eva.

"If you be very quiet and listen you may hear them talk to you," Eva said.

"I'll try," Hitler said. He held his breath and listened with full concentration.

"Hello, Hitler, you jerk," Johny said, winking at Georgy.

"I heard them," Hitler said in awe. "It sounded a little like my father."

"EVA BRAUN is right," Johny said in a sepuchral voice. "If you cross the channel you will be defeated. The English are ready for your troops. They'll never reach shore."

"But what should I do?" Hitler said in a whisper. "I can't just order my troops not to invade. I have to have some reason—don't I?"

"What's the matter?" Johny asked. "aren't you the Leader? Aren't they supposed to do what you say? England is no good to you. You can hold her off from invading Europe indefinitely. Russia is your real enemy. Lick Russia and the whole world will capitulate!"

"They are right," Hitler breathed.

"What did they say?" Eva asked.

"They gave me the real message," Hitler said. "I never thought of it myself. I couldn't have. It would have been too mad. But its very madness insures its success. They told me to forget about England and whip Russia. With Russia defeated I can have millions of troops and make every German an officer. It's wonderful. At last the spirits talk to me direct. I don't need to listen to my spiritualist advisers any more. At last I am the true Leader."

Eva looked startled. She stared at Hitler blankly for a long minute. In her thoughts she said, "Thank you, whatever you are. That will ensure his eventual downfall. I'm glad. I'll have to stick with him to the end. Anything else would be death—and I love him."

"Yes, Adolph," she said aloud. "I'm sure you are the true Leader now. No one but a real Leader could think of something so mad it would succeed in its very madness. A lesser man would have invaded England."

"We doo it!" Johnny and Georgey said in unison.

"It's almost like we had actually changed the war all by ourselves," Johnny added thoughtfully.

"Yeah," Georgey agreed. "But of course that can't be true, because it turned out that way anyway."

"Well," Johnny said matter-of-factly, "we'd better get back to our room. Do you realize we've been galivanting around half the night? Unless we get some sleep, mom might suspect something and take our stuff away from us."

"Gosh yes," Georgey said. "Let's

get out of here. If she found out she'd do more than that. She might even give us a lickin'!"

"Oh, darling Eva," Hitler said. "I've been so lonesome without you today. And now you've brought the spirits to me and they've shown me how to conquer the world."

He held out his arms and Eva crept into them, hiding the weariness on her face by burying her head in his neck and murmuring sweet words.

"What a woman," Georgey said.

"And the world never knew that she saved it from defeat," Johnny said. "You know, I'm going to listen to the spool on World War II again when we get back home. Maybe there'll be something about this on it. That's what Hobson says—that alterations in historical events might change subsequent events to be consistent with them. We might find the spools changed to compensate for this—if we did something to change things."

"Nuts," Georgey said. "Come on. I don't want a tanning before breakfast in the morning."

CHILDREN SHOULD BE SEEN...

BY
DON ELWOOD

IT COULDN'T happen. It was impossible. Such things simply do not occur.

But it did. And on Metropolis Field too. That's what made it double-unlikely. Metropolis Field was the biggest spaceport in North America. But little Roger Crane didn't know that. In fact, little Roger Crane knew very little. You couldn't expect him to know much. He was only six years old.

The *Callisto II*, one of the biggest of the Planetary Fleet Company's craft, lay in the loading dock, its six hundred feet of length pointed skyward. It would be another day before it was loaded and headed for Mars on its weekly trip. Yet, it had, as always, a skeleton crew aboard. There were supposed to be at least four men aboard the vessel at all times.

The purser had, just at that moment, to

visit his friend at a neighboring dock. Two watchmen had taken their usual sneak for a quick drink, the engineer's mate had left to pick up a book at a near-by store (he'd have been back in a minute!) and at the gate the guard turned his back for just ten seconds.

Little Roger Crane, who was visiting the offices of his Dad in the Administration Building, was accustomed to wandering around freely. Inevitably he hung around the big rockets, but he wasn't surprised when he walked aboard the *Callisto II*. Oh, maybe he was a little elated because a guard didn't say the usual "go on, sonny, you can't come in here," but he certainly didn't think about it.

Anyhow, he wandered through the unguarded gate and aboard the gigantic space ship. It was very fascinating and no

one stopped him. He climbed endless ladders and flights of steps and it was lots of fun! Gee, maybe he'd be a space pilot some day. Boy, wouldn't it be fun!

Roger was very interested when he came to the big room with all the lights and dials and gauges. There were funny chairs and instruments everywhere. And then the trouble came.

To launch a space ship is a simple operation for a single man. All he needs is plenty of training and the knowledge of how to punch buttons in the right sequence. That's where chance came in. Little Roger stood on the pilot's cushioned chair, fascinated by the rows of buttons. And at random he began punching them, his method the same as that of the child who bangs away at a typewriter.

But the impossible sequence—for chance—occurred. Roger hit all the right buttons.

The rocket shot skyward and the heavy hand of acceleration flipped Roger end over end. Fright paralyzed him as he fell headlong from the seat. The slight blow knocked him unconscious.

There's nothing else to tell. The blistering that the yardmaster got was worse than that of the purser and the engineer. The Patrol boarded the errant craft a million miles into space and all they found was a frightened little six year old boy, instead of the gang of crooks that they expected, plus a huge space ship with damaged airlocks and automatic bulkheads shut.

That little incident can't possibly happen again—not after this—but if you see a little boy in a space dock...

...AND NOT HEARD!

BY

FRANK PILLAR

THE HELI-TAXI landed smoothly on the terrace of the three-hundredth floor of the Kerry-Flakeland Hotel in the heart of that American jewel, Manhattan. James Allerdycce (the Third) of Allerdycce Enterprises, Inc. escorted the beautifully clad girl into the foyer. "Darling," he enthused to his starry-eyed companion, "this is it. You've never imagined what delicious food can be. This will be an evening you'll never forget." He sighed gustily and raised his eyes to the heavens.

Three minutes later under the escort of the headwaiter and a dozen flunkies, Allerdycce and Gloria were seated in sybaritic splendor in the Interstellar Room. To one side, near the dance floor, an orchestra played soft engaging music. Gentle ever-changing lights played over the crowd. All was dignity and majestic charm. Here was North America's most exclusive hostelry.

But there was a difference.

No waiters pussy-footed around the gorgeous dining-room. To the right hand of each diner was an inconspicuous series of buttons with a roller-list.

"What do I do?" Gloria asked puzzled. Thinking is not encouraged even now among beautiful debutantes (Gloria Van Clayton—Atomic Power, Ltd. nine-hundred million credits).

"Wine list, hors d'oeuvres, entrees, desserts—everything right here." Allerdycce tapped the roller list with a bejeweled forefinger.

After ten minutes of elaborate discussion in which Allerdycce's gastronomic skill was made clear, the two started pressing buttons. Five minutes later the center table top slid aside, a plunger arose and, robot-like, they were presented with their drinks.

Gloria looked puzzled: "I didn't order an Atom," she said, piqued, "I wanted a Clare." "Funny," Allerdycce agreed, "I wanted a Lunar Sour. Something's wrong." Then they noticed others looking angry.

The headwaiter was fluttering around like a madman. Everything was mixed-up. People ordered sirloin of beef and got mashed potatoes. A tipsy boozier ordered four ounces of whiskey and got a glass of milk. Foods, drinks, salads, desserts and what have you became mixed indiscriminately.

Pierre was paralyzed and his assistants stood around tearing at their hair. Many people started to leave.

"I didn't expect anything like this," Gloria said as she rose to leave. "What's the matter with you, Allerdycce—this place is a—a—a—" she fumbled and then decided to use the word—"dumpli!"

Allerdycce nodded in despair, "Yes, my dear, it is."

Twenty stories below, the two adolescent boys crouched in the little room watching through the open door, watching for parental interference.

"Gee, Jimmy," the dark-haired one said, "this is fun."

"Yeah," agreed the other, "I'm glad Dad got me the tool kit." He fumbled with the box of cutters, splicers, insulators and meters. "Well, let's do some more." The two turned their attention back to the open panel of the fuse box with its myriad of fine wires, now looking like a mass of writhing snakes. The younger boy's foot brushed against a book on the floor. "The Young Electronic Experimentor," it said in bright red on its cover...

BEGINNING WITH THE MARCH ISSUE OF
AMAZING STORIES

196 PAGES!

AND NO TOMORROW

He was sure that the blast of the atom bomb could not reach him here. Then why was a nameless terror swelling within him?

By Russell Storm

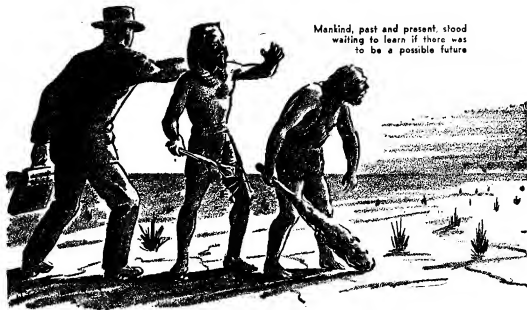
HE THOUGHT, "In the beginning the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

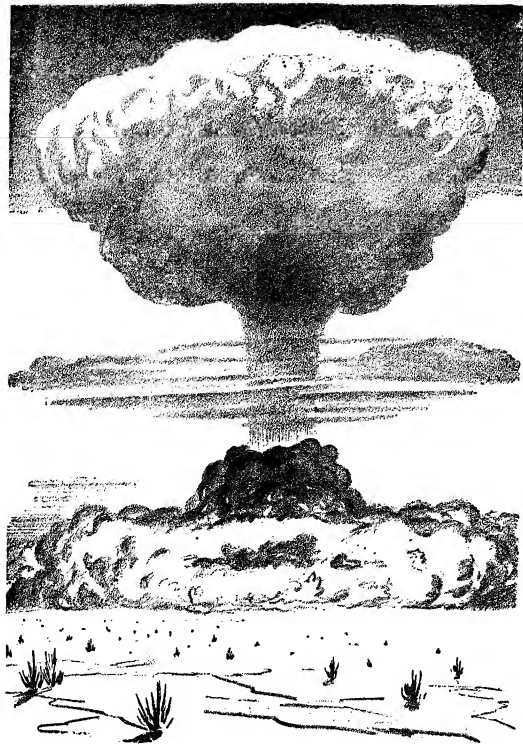
The quotation came up from childhood memories. Waiting here, with the hushed voice of the announcer whispering through the loud speaker, "Zero minus ten seconds, zero minus nine seconds, zero minus—" the quotation sent an odd scurry of fear through him.

It was odd that any fear could touch him now, in these hushed seconds before this atom bomb test, odd because he had thought his nervous system was so saturated with fear that it was no longer capable of registering any increase of tension.

This shelter, designed as an advance observation post, was many miles away from the scene of the explosion. It was safe enough, according to the calculations, unless—

Mankind, past and present, stood
waiting to learn if there was
to be a possible future





He thought: "Fear was useful once. Because men were afraid, they ran away—and lived another day. They ran from the mammoth, from the great cave bear, from the packs of wolves of the dawn world, and because they ran away from forces that were stronger than they were, they survived. I wish—"

The wish was meaningless. There was no place of refuge, no cave, no deep bomb shelter that would save him now, if this test was what he feared it was.

"What now, little man?" he thought.

"Zero minus seven seconds," the loudspeaker answered.

In just seven seconds this new bomb would explode.

The first atom bomb had seemed powerful enough when it had been tested. But this new one—

It was all quite simple. An ordinary shotgun shell consists of a primer and a powder charge. When struck by the firing pin, the primer explodes. This minor explosion ignites the powder in the shell.

OUT THERE in a few seconds they were going to test a bomb that used an ordinary atom bomb as a primer. When the ordinary atom bomb exploded, a temperature of several million degrees would result. At this temperature, lithium and hydrogen will explode with approximately twice the violence of uranium.

They thought of it as a super weapon. But what if it wasn't a weapon? What if it was star-stuff?

It was this question that was driving Nicholson mad.

"Zero minus five seconds," the loudspeaker said.

Five seconds more and they would know the answer. He thought:

"Write in five seconds the history of the human race, the history of the children of earth. Start with Pekin man, with Java man...."

Evidence existed which indicated that Pekin man lived possibly half a million years ago and that he knew something about fire. For this length of time, men had had the secret of fire.

They had had the secret of nuclear fission for less than twenty years. In this length of time, they had learned to build bigger and better bombs.

"Bigger and better," Nicholson thought. "Always we have wanted something bigger and better."

It was this wish for something better that had eventually made Pekin man into homo sapiens. The wish had always seemed a laudable ambition, except, possibly, when applied to an atom bomb. Maybe there was an atom bomb that was too big....

"Life is an intruder in the cosmos," Nicholson thought. "And as an intruder, it is constantly being kicked out the door."

"Zero minus three seconds."

The voice had acquired a hypnotic quality now. Around him Nicholson was aware of men frozen and motionless while they waited for the explosion that was to come. Probably it had been the same way when the first atom bomb had been tested. No one had been sure then, no one was sure now. The calculations said.... But what if the mathematics lied? What if some unguessed factor existed that made all the figures wrong?

"Zero," the loudspeaker said.

THERE WAS a moment of silence, of nothingness, during which Nicholson was aware of an urge to scream. "Stop this test!" But nothing could stop it now. The

equipment actuating the bomb was automatic.

The moment of silence ended in sudden frantic sound as meters designed to detect various kinds and various intensities of radiation began to chatter. The first blast of radiation had reached the shelter. There was no sound as yet, sound would come later.

"Stand by for the shock wave!" a hoarse voice said. Nicholson's voice. He did not realize he had spoken. Under his feet the solid concrete jumped.

Nicholson fell. Around him thunder roared. The concrete bounced up and down like the head of a monstrous drum.

"This is it," he thought. And knew he was right. This was it.

Two pictures appeared in his mind. The first was that of his mother, the second that of his wife. Inexplicably they blended into one picture. The two women were back in the United States, thousands of miles

from the scene of this test.

How long would it be before they knew what had happened? Would the reaction take an hour to reach them? Or would it travel with the speed of light and be there practically instantaneously?

He did not know. "Go quietly, dear children," he thought. "Go quietly away from this earth. Go along now, to your far-off home."

He was not sorry. He was not afraid. Once such emotional responses as sorrow and fear had been useful to the race of men. Now—

Under him the concrete jolted—and flared into heat measured by the millions of degrees....

About three years later, the length of time light uses to travel from the solar system to the star Antares, astronomers on the planets circling this star noted with calm interest the sudden appearance of a new nova—a new star—in that section of the sky which once had been occupied by the planet Earth.

FIVE FAST HOURS

By Steve Lyons

SPACE is shrinking and time is growing. Both so fast that we're left with our heads swimming. In a year or so, a British jet airliner will be put into regular service. And it literally will go faster than the wind. The six powerful jet engines that drive it will hurl it between London and New York at the rate of six hundred miles an hour!

This fantastic figure is only a starter. Within ten years that incredible speed may be doubled or tripled, for the rocket men will then begin to have their say. Shortly no point on Earth will be very far away from any other point. At last distances will be measured in terms of hours and mighty few of them.

Science fiction simply cannot keep pace with reality when it comes to physical accomplishments. All the things that are commonplace today were the potential miracles of yesteryear. This luxurious air transport which will soon sweep the world is as surely a part of fantasy as if it didn't exist. But it does. What prognostications can we make now?

SUPERMAN— SUPERMARKET!

By Henry Gade

THE GROCERY store of the future has already been built! And that's no gag-line either. Some inventor put together a store which is practically a robot. You walk into the place and shop by punching buttons. When you're through, you walk out, pay an automatically tabulated bill, and pick up your boxed goods. This store was far too advanced for this jet age though. It's been closed down—a failure. People couldn't take the machine-age grocery.

The inventor philosophizes that his invention still will be the coming thing. A new idea, he maintains, is always hard to get across. And he's right. The shopper of a century hence will do even less probably. He'll just talk into a microphone from his living room and the goods will be delivered automatically. This little failure has set us to wondering how many inventions have died an early death simply because people weren't ready for them? We'll just have to stick around until 2050 to see what's become of the super-super-market!



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

Conducted by ROG PHILLIPS

A LOT HAS happened since last month. For one thing, I attended the World Science Fiction Convention at Cincinnati, and met a couple of hundred very fine people, all of whom I found I liked very much, and all of whom I would like to have for personal friends. I'll tell you about the convention; but first I want to tell you about another thing that has happened.

Amazing Stories has a new editor now. He isn't exactly new, since he used to be editor of *Mammoth Detective* and *Mammoth Mystery* a couple years ago, and has just come back to his old desk again. His name is Howard Browne, and between you and me he's a nice guy. I don't think we'll have any trouble with him.

He has lots of plans for a bigger and better *Amazing* that I hope pan out. He's a good editor and a good guy. Let's give him a big hand. ("Ouch!" Howard just said. Guess my hand struck too far down when I was patting him on the back.)

But if you could meet him you'd like him. He's almost as big as Art Rapp says I am, a good bowler and poker player, and has a deep sense of humor that fits with mine.

He knows what a good story is and plans to bring you the best. More of them, too, since he plans on giving *Amazing* more pages than any other sf prozine on the stands. And the CLUB HOUSE will continue to be a regular feature, so you guys and gals that put out fanzines can still count on a plug in *Amazing*, and you fans who want to know where to get the fanzines can still get that information here.

The Convention was a howling success. Ray Palmer and I went down together. I stayed until the end, but Ray had to get back to Chicago early so didn't stay after the second day.

Most of us were at the Hotel Metropole, where the convention was held. The meeting hall was the Metropole's banquet room, and the whole mezzanine was more or less taken over by the fans—the lobby too. It was in the lobby that I unwittingly staged a water pistol battle with a few fans and innocent bystanders, not realizing the pistol was loaded, and even soaking an old lady who was passing near. I was stone sober at the time, too.

There were a couple of hundred of us

there, all told. Don Ford and the other Cincy fans really put on a good show. At the auction there were dozens of originals of illustrations and covers from the various sf magazines of the past year, including some from *Amazing Stories*. More than one fan took an enviable prize home with him to hang on the wall of his den.

There were plenty of authors there, too. I didn't make a speech, but there were lots of good speeches by authors and fans. Vince Hamlin, father of Alley Oop, took over the limelight while he was there. He's a very popular fellow. The Alley Oop originals he donated for the auction went like dollar bills for forty-nine cents at the Mint. There are probably two dozen fans with an Alley Oop pinned on the wall in their rooms right this minute.

If I were to tell you of every thing I enjoyed at the convention it would take you three days to read it, because every minute was full of enjoyment.

On the voting for the next convention site I was appointed vote counter. Maybe some of you wonder why I gave it to Portland instead of New York then—hey! What am I saying? But it could almost have been crooked. In fact I could have let it go to New York for 1950 without being crooked. This is the way that came about:

On the first vote there were four possible cities to vote on. New York and Portland, Oregon, won the most votes. The second voting was to choose between these two. There were three of us counting the votes, and on the count it turned out that New York had sixty votes, and Portland had fifty-nine votes. That was too close to let it go. I carefully recounted, making sure none of the vote slips were stuck together. It came out a tie, sixty to sixty. The third voting switched a few votes either way, as people changed their minds, giving Portland a plurality of four votes.

So in 1950 the World Science Fiction Convention will be held in Portland, under the auspices of the Portland Science-Fantasy Society (PSFS). They will have a high mark to aim at, because the Convention surpassed all previous conventions so far that it will probably never again be equaled. But if anyone can do it, the PSFSers can. They are a very active group, with lots of enterprising members. Just as the CLUB HOUSE was open to

the Cinvention Committee, and helped make the Cinvention a success, I offer it pages to the Porcon Committee to help make the Porcon an even better success. How about it, Don Day?

From Cincinnati I went to New York on a combination vacation and business trip (the only kind of vacation I have time for), and met the ESFA group. (Eastern Science Fiction Association.)

At the ESFA meeting I was guest speaker. Dr. Tom Gardner told me I was to speak for an hour. Did you ever try to talk for a solid hour? Anyway, at the end of five minutes I was talked out. Of the literally thousands upon thousands of jokes I know, I couldn't even remember one. The first time I ever came to Chicago I was here three weeks, and told jokes the whole three weeks without repeating myself.

But there I was, standing in front of an audience of fans, their mouths agape waiting for words of wis—entertainment, fifty-five minutes to go, and nary a thought.

What did I do? I went into a Null F pause. Coming out of it, I uttered these unforgettable words: "Any questions?" For fifty-five minutes I answered questions.

After the meeting we all went over to a nice eating spot in Newark where Forrest Ackerman and I were the guests of the ESFA group at their banquet. It was really wonderful meeting all those very nice people. Science Fiction fandom is about the finest group of people you could ever know, and no kidding.

I had quite an unpleasant five minutes while I was in New York. I stayed at the MacAlpin Hotel which is in the same block as the Empire State Building. My room was on the seventeenth floor. I'm an absent-minded cuss, and in my time have poured coffee in the sugar bowl and the cream pitcher, cream in the sugar bowl, put sugar in the cream pitcher, poured syrup down my back and scratched my pancakes at breakfast, and things like that.

Well, I was doing some typing, and got up to stretch my legs. I went over to the window and leaned out. Seventeen floors below me was the sidewalk. I thought, "Boy, what that could do for me." Then I went back to my typewriter. A few minutes later I heard ambulance sirens converging toward the hotel. Dozens of them, it seemed, were coming to screaming stops on the street below.

Suddenly the possible meaning of it struck me. My fingers froze above the typewriter. I broke out in a cold sweat. Running to the window I looked down, then pulled back into the room with a sigh of relief. You see, I thought maybe I had absent-mindedly jumped out. I mean, after all, I am absent-minded. What I mean is, I still break out in a sweat when I think what a close call it was. Those ambulances could have been coming for *my body*!

The fan convention is over. I met many old friends for the first time in person at the Cinvention. Milt Rothman, Art Rapp,

Jimmy Taurasi, and so many more I can't begin to list them. I made lots of new friends. Don Day, Nancy Moore, Bea Mahaffy, and the rest of the Cincy group. (By the way, some of the fanzines given to me at the convention for review got lost somewhere, so if you gave me one and I don't review it, you'll know what happened and forgive me.)

All of you who attended the Cinvention can say the same thing: you came away richer in friendships. And those of you who didn't attend—well, I hope you can be at the next fan convention in Portland.

Now we come to reviews of the fanzines. Let's see, where did I put it? By the way, the Cincy group is getting a mimeograph outfit with their share of the proceeds of the convention, so one of these days soon they'll be sending a fanzine for review.

SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT: Alan M. Grant, 129 Edgemore St., Fayetteville, New York. No price listed because I can't find the zine. Maybe I reviewed it already last month. I have a letter from Alan, its editor, wondering what became of it. In three-quarter syllable words he really tells me off, so please, some of you send him at least a nickel and get his fanzine to make up for it. He concludes his letter with, "P.S. eye amm making a nam fore myself inn Fandom. Sorry i kant menshun itt hear." Send for his fanzine and find out what other fans are calling him! Exclusive in the current issue of **SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT**! Send him a dime. Then you, too, can call him one.

MUTANT: 15c, 2/25c; bi-monthly; Michigan Science Fantasy Society, Stewart Metchette, 3551 King St., Windsor, Ont., or George Young, 22180 Middlebelt Rd., Farmington, Mich. The contents page lists William James, Norman Ashfield, Ed Cox, Art Rapp, Richard Avery, and Don Vetowich as contributors, with Nelson and Rotsler as interior artists, and R.G. Rowe as cover artist. Three short stories and three poems. Avery beats Art Rapp by about six lengths with his take-off on the Raven in the same rhythm, titled "Rain". But Art didn't do so bad with his poetry either.

The MSFS is a very nice bunch. They were just about all at the Convention. They dragged me off to a burlesque show one night, with me pretending I didn't want to go, and holding my hands in front of my face (while I peeked through my fingers) all through the show. Redd Boggs was among them. We all wound up about two in the morning drinking coffee in a hamburger joint.

SPACEWARP: 15c, 9/\$1.00; Art Rapp, 2120 Bay St., Saginaw, Mich.. The September issue featuring an account of the convention. You know, Art Rapp had the most unusual flash camera I've ever seen—or rather, flash bulbs. With most cameras the bulb merely flashes. With his they "fffft" besides. Hope he sends me the pic-

ture he took of me. I hope everybody who took a picture of me sends me one.

Art titles his Cincy report, "Vas Ve Efer In Cincinnati?" It's an excellent story of the convention, complete with cartoon illustrations. Art must have had his glasses on upside down and saw me through the bifocals, though, because he describes me as being six feet six. I'm only six feet two and a half. Art reminds you to be sure and send your dollar for the Porcon to Donald B. Day, 3435 N.E. 38th Ave., Portland 13, Oregon. One of the sketches drawn by Ray Nelson to illustrate the Cincy account is of a grinning fan with his arms full of original art work he bought at the auction, but with no trousers, implying he hocked them to get money for another illo. Some of them just about did that. Walter Coslet of Montana spent a small fortune on buying things at the auction. And it was Erwin Stirmweis I accidentally shot with an automatic water pistol, not knowing it was loaded.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c, bi-weekly; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing, New York; first September issue. This also contains the report on the Cincinvention. I met Jimmy at Cincinnati, and also at the ESFA meeting in Newark, New Jersey. Glancing over his report I see I forgot to mention that there was a Miss Science Fiction present at the Convention. Lois Miles was Miss Science Fiction of 1949. A very beautiful blonde from New York. And Ted Carnell, who came all the way from England to attend the convention, was in my opinion the best speaker there.

ROCKET NEWS LETTER: 15c, \$1.50/yr; Wayne Proell, 10630 S. St. Louis Ave., Chicago. Official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society. September 1949 issue. There's a nine-page article on "The Design of a Practical Space Ship", by Wayne Proell, in this issue that should be a must for all stf writers. A few of the details are of interest here. The ship would take off like a plane rather than a rocket, and would weigh one to three hundred tons. It would

take about three hours to leave the Earth behind, and could reach the Moon in seventy hours. The rest of the journal is taken up with rocketry abstracts and club news.

If you live in or near Chicago you should look into this group. They are a very active bunch, and are primarily interested in that next great achievement on the list, the first trip to the Moon. They believe it's coming very soon, maybe in 1950. Let's hope so!

SPATIUM: 10c; journal of the Central New York Science Fantasy Society; Harold W. Cheney, Jr., 584 E. Monroe St., Little Falls, New York, with Ron Stone, Dik Hollister, and Jim Goldfrank helping him. Irregular schedule.

The feature article this issue is "The Creator", by Ron Stone, and is about Stanley Weinbaum, a great stf author. Articles, book reviews, and a letter department make up the rest of the issue. If you live around Utica, New York, you should get in touch with this group. If you don't you're missing half the fun of being a fan.

SPACESHIP: 5c, published quarterly, Bob Silverberg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N.Y. First story in this issue is "John Brown's Cellar" by Bob Silverberg. It starts out, "John Brown was my neighbor. One day he walked into the cellar to get something and never came out." Driving straight toward the ghoul in the first line!

Bob asked me to announce the formation of a new APA, to be called the Junior Amateur Fantasy Association. Should be Press instead of Fantasy, so I combined the two on my own. But it will be known as JAPA. It will limit its membership to twenty-five, with age limit at eighteen years. Write to him if you're interested.

SCIENTIFANTASY: "Fandom's Pro-zine"; 20c, 75c/yr.; Bill Kroll, 1031 & John Grossman, 1037 W. 18th, Des Moines, Iowa. In the same block. Small enough to fit in your pocket. A professional photo-offset job, with artwork that any prozine should envy. One of their illustrators, Hannes

(Continued On Page 154)

THOUSANDS EVERYWHERE ACCLAIM THIS

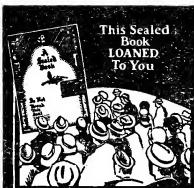
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(Continued From Page 152)

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Bok, is an outstanding artist. The fiction and articles in this issue are also of very high quality. And there's a stf comic strip by John Grossman, one of the best of fan artisans. This should be a collector's item. It's perfect in every way.

SCIENCE FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: 4/65c, quarterly; Franklin M. Dietz Jr., P.O. Box 696, Kings Park, Long Island, New York. I met Frank at the Convention. A quiet, intelligent fellow who takes fandom very seriously, and his fanzine shows real editorial and publishing talent. S.F. & S.F. is the official organ of the Fantasy Artisans, and so always has top quality fan artwork. There's a guest editorial by Kenneth Slater, British fan, and a report on the New York Conclave which had a couple of big New York pro editors in attendance. The cover is an excellent three color photo-offset job.

CANADIAN FANDOM: no. 16; with a Mac cover!; 10c; Ned McKeown, 1398 Mt. Pleasant Rd., Toronto 12, Ontario. Twenty-six pages, letter size. There's a nice short story, "Thou Art My Brother", by Eric Dorn. Several articles and features. The editorial concerns something all Canadians should learn about, but which can't be mentioned in the CLUB HOUSE.

Best article in the issue is "The Fundamental Problem" by Alastair Cameron. It discusses the question of nuclear forces, those little known forces that bind the parts of an atomic nucleus into a whole.

SCRAP-BAG: Vol. 2, no. 1; the variety fanmag; 25c; Charles Henderson, 2146 E. 13th St. S., Salt Lake City 6, Utah. Highlight of the issue is a short story by E.E. Evans, entitled "Problem".

Mystery: since this copy is the first of volume two, how come it's a first issue? But from the editorials there's plenty of activity going on down in Utah.

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE, SECTION 233)

Of Amazing Stories, Published Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1949

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, Howard Browne, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Managing Editor, William L. Hamling, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.
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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was:—
(This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspaper only.) A. T. PULLEN, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1949. [SEAL] ALBERT H. WITTHOFT, Notary Public. (My commission expires April 9, 1950.)

Ben Singer's hoax about Bob Tucker dying found some victims here. There's a very touching paragraph about Tucker's death. For the benefit of those of you who weren't at the Convention, Ben Singer pulled a hoax about Bob Tucker dying. A lot of people believed it. Bob, a good natured guy, didn't resent it. A hoax like that could be carried too far. Suppose Bob Tucker died now. No one would believe it.

WONDER: one year subscription given for one copy of any sf or fantasy magazine sent to Michael Tealby, 8 Burfield Avenue, Loughborough, Leics., England. Mr. Tealby sent a letter with this issue of his fanzine, saying, "Through your review of my fanzine I've found some good friends over there in the United States." I'm happy to hear that, and hope more of you write to him.

The contents of Wonder this time include two short stories, "Futility", by Cedric Walker, which is about the best story I've found in a fanzine for some time, and "Legacy", by Peter J. Ridley.

I have a letter from the Golden Gate Futurian Society, the fan club of San Francisco. It's from William D. Knapheide, 1084 Portola Drive, San Francisco, asking me to announce that anyone interested in joining the Frisco group contact him or Mrs. Rose Davenport, 137 Cherry Ave., South San Francisco, the secretary.

John York of 17 W. 32nd St., N.Y.C., has sent me the cover of what will be *Weird Unsolved Mysteries* no. 2, 25c.

Calvin T. Beck, 135 W. 47th St., New York 19, asks me to announce "the existence of our club, the International Science Fantasy Correspondence Trading Club, a service to all fans interested in good discussions of factual science and the exchange of ideas in relation to science... This isn't a club intended for older fans or men of the sciences, but for amateur scientists and new fans as well as veterans fandom and advanced researchers." Sounds like a nice group, but any group is only what its members make it, so make it a better group by joining up yourself. Write to Cal, and be sure and enclose a stamp to pay the postage on his reply.

Morton D. Paley of the A.B.C. Science Fiction Club, 1455 Townsend Ave., New York 52, asks that I announce the existence of his club. It looks like there's about one sf club to each neighborhood in New York, but if you've ever been there you'd realize that the city can stand that many.

This is written on September 22, 1949. If any of you sent me anything for review prior to this date and it hasn't been reviewed in this and previous CH's, it either didn't reach me, or got lost in the shuffle of my poor filing system. If so, I hope you will send me another copy and mention the fact that you were overlooked. Send everything for the CLUB HOUSE to Rog Phillips, Box 671, Evanston, Ill.

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FABLES FROM THE FUTURE

By
JOSEPH HILL

MIGHTY BIOLOGICALS

THE FUTURE holds terrific promise, for out of the biological laboratories of today are coming discoveries which are just a shadow of what is likely to come. Science can only whisper of drugs which may cure anything, can only hint of surgical techniques of incredible skill, and can only delicately imply the impossible miracle of immortality.

Gerontology, the study of old age, is fast becoming a major branch of medicine which will assume increasing importance because birth rates are decreasing and more and more older and old people are major parts of the population of the countries of the world. In the intricate probing into the mystery of old age, we can see enormous possibilities. True, immortality seems an impossible end. No one really asks that, but it is certain that the life span is being extended. It is perfectly possible that the man of the year two thousand may expect to live a hundred years or more just as we of today expect a longevity of sixty or seventy years. And the scientists of the future will keep pushing up that age limit. It is perfectly imaginable that the year twenty-five hundred will have many persons two hundred years old, alive and healthy. Think of the infinite advantages and tremendous learning opportunities of such a condition. If we can just hang on another fifty years...

SKIN DEEP

I KNOW YOU may not believe this, but I tell you it is true. And if you doubt me, you can find the detailed story in any one of the encyclopedias. Just go to the Mini-plate section, get a projector and see it on the screen for yourself. It happened so many hundreds of years ago, that it is hard to believe that it could have been at all.

People once hated each other because the color of their skins was different! Now, don't laugh; it's true. There were naturally white and black and yellow and red-skinned people, and they feared and hated each other because of that—and for no other reason! There were some of course who didn't, who realized that was silly. But they were a minority. Sometimes those mass executions which were called "wars" happened because of this strange attitude.

All right! If this class doesn't stop laughing I'll have it disciplined—and you know what that means! Now give me your attention.

This weird condition existed until Dr. Harriman of the Dermatological Institute discovered the nature and cause of pigmentation. And when his discovery was announced, everyone, all over the Earth wanted his skin changed to white. Can you imagine that!

Twenty years after the pigmentation process was found, all the world consisted of people with white skins! These things sound strange to you because you can't imagine how desperately people felt about the matter of color.

Fortunately times have changed. The fashion experts realized they had a wonderful instrument at hand. And now we are all slaves to it. As I look at you, and see you with your vari-colored skins, ranging through the entire spectrum, I can't imagine anything different. It seems natural to me.

You, Lady Senn, look beautiful with that rich Tyrrhenian purple skin. And you also, Lady Fane, with that rich golden-yellow hide. Personally I prefer my own black covering. There seems to be less glare to it, although my wife makes me change my color to blue for evening wear. She herself favors a brilliant green skin that I'm very fond of.

I'd like a couple of you to prepare a report on this subject. Xaxen, and Cronet!—both of you will prepare to talk during the next lecture period on the subject of "Color and People" and I want you to catch the atmosphere of hatred and distrust that was once felt. Do you understand? Very well—class dismissed!

ULTIMATE EVOLUTION

A GROUP of us, writers, the editor, a couple of artists and a science-fiction fan or two, were lounging in the comfortable office, talking. Inevitably the gabfest drifted away from the jokes, ran through the general subject of women and then warmed more to the favorite subject of memorable stories. A host of stories popped up as favorites of one or another, ranging from the well-remembered "Adam Link" series to some of the Phillips super-epics.

For a while the babel was confusing, each reader asserting that his selection was the best.

Even as we talked, you could almost see each man visualizing the tremendous impression each story he fondly recalled had made. The talk quieted down somewhat and the room became filled with the ghosts of science-fiction past, as well as cigarette smoke.

In a momentary lull in the conversation, we were astonished to hear Brady talking rather loudly:

"You haven't—not a one of you—mentioned the best one of all." He said the words with an edge of bitterness. Brady was a rather quiet mouse of a man, a

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likeable fellow who followed a-f closely but usually had very little to say.

Somebody laughed.

"I suppose you know the best one," one of us mildly taunted.

For once Brady met the issue.

"Yes," he said positively, "I can name the best and most impressionable science-fiction story. It was *Alas, All Thinking*, by Harry Bates."

No one said a word. We were recalling the story—or trying to. Encouraged by our silence, Brady went on:

"The story was simple. A time-Traveler from the present journeys into the remote future. He lands his machine, steps out and finds the Earth sort of a barren prairie. The Earth has receded from the Sun and now is a little glowing coal in the sky. The T-T looks around for people—and finally he finds some. They live in simple mud huts, they aren't many, and they do nothing. They are the ultimate evolutionary adaptation of human beings. Some are in the advanced state, being nothing but huge heads supported by a bracket on a wall, their vestigial bodies of no use whatsoever.

"The T-T discovers that these people have one objective and that is to sit and think, to do nothing but cogitate and meditate on the Nature of the Universe. In the advanced stages their metabolism is so low that they're fed capsules by a machine which pops the pellets into their mouths!"

Brady paused and noted our interest. There was a pleased little smile on his face. He was the narrator now.

Jimson said; "I remember that story too. It was good at that. But it wasn't the greatest. Not by any means. Why, I re—"

"Wait a minute," Brady cut him off. "I haven't finished."

We nodded and he continued:

"Anyhow the T-T took a less repulsive specimen back to his own time, the Twentieth Century and tried to teach her something about life. But her mentality was dominant and all she could do was to speculate about the nature of love."

He stopped. We waited.

"Go on," I urged.

He shook his head. "That's about all there is to it. The rest of the story is unimportant and anti-climactic." There was a peculiar ironic smile on Brady's face and I had a funny feeling that something was different about him.

He got up, his eyes unrevealing behind their thick lenses. He walked toward the door. All of us felt the oddness. It was in the air.

When he reached the door, his appearance became even different. He took off his hat. I had never noticed it before but his head was remarkably large. His heavy overcoat fell open and his body seemed amazingly slim.

"So long," he said and there was irony in his tone. He waved a pipestem arm and vanished through the doorway. I couldn't shake off the feeling that gripped me. For

a bare moment I'd have sworn he looked like one of the creatures in the story he had just described.

"Aw, he's a nut," Felton said mockingly and the matter was closed. I still shudder a little when I think of Brady's face though. Could it be?...

BOOMERANG!

I CAN'T WAIT to see her face, he thought. Tonight'll really be fun. I wonder if she's learned to use the thing yet? Oh well, he assured himself, it can't be that complicated. His mind tripped on, imagining the wonderful dinner he was going to get.

Bill Newton had just spent three hundred dollars for the new induction heating range. It looked much like the conventional kitchen type, but as the blurbs had it, "no flame, no warmth, no heat—but it COOKS!" It was really quite simple when you got down to it. It contained a four kilowatt radio transmitter with suitable switches and heating coils. All you did was to locate the food to be cooked within the circle of a coil, press the timer button and in fractions of a minute, your food was cooked! Induction heating wasn't new, but these '55 kitchen model ranges, using it, were.

Newton entered the apartment gleefully. He swung open the rear door. He wanted to enter the kitchen first so as to surprise Louise.

As he swung the door open, he stood stock still. The peaceful happy scene he expected to see never materialized. Louise was at the opposite end of the kitchen, her back to the wall, her eyes wide in mingled astonishment and dismay, touched perhaps by terror.

Bill dropped his brief case. His gaze shifted from Louise to the range. He heard Louise's rapid intake of breath.

"Oh Bill," she sobbed, and ran into his arms. "It just happened."

"I know, darling, I know," Bill soothed her, "it'll be all right. Just wait until you get the hang of it." Then he burst into laughter in spite of his efforts to suppress it.

For the kitchen was a culinary shambles. Particles of meat, gobs of potatoes, were splattered all over the walls and ceilings. The room looked as if a little boy had been flinging eggs and meat and vegetables at random, enjoying their *splat* against the walls.

When Louise stopped sobbing long enough to explain, Bill discovered what had happened.

"I just put the foods on, honey," Louise said, "and turned on the switches. Then everything happened at once. I thought the stove would explode." She wiped a generous gob of potato from behind her ear.

The serviceman who came out twenty minutes later found the trouble in a hur-

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ry. He couldn't keep from grinning as he explained it to Bill.

"One of the switches shorted," he said, "and that overloaded the transmitter. Naturally the gadget poured a terrific amount of heat into the food all at once. Only one thing could happen and did—the food had to explode. That overloaded transmitter was shoving maybe ten or fifteen kilowatts of power into a potato. Bang! Up she goes. Don't worry about now, though. It's O.K."

"I don't want to go back to gas or electricity, dear," Louise said, noting the rather crest-fallen look on her husband's face.

SPACE WRECK!

REMAIN calm and do not lose your head.

The words repeated themselves over and over again, like a child's rhyme, in Communication Officer Linton's mind. Yes, that's what the manual said: *Remain calm and do not lose your head.*

Linton shivered in the confines of his space suit. Panic and terror fought to grip him. How impossible this was! Eight minutes ago he'd been in a rocket Speedster reporting to the Lunar base. In his mind's eye, Linton saw the gauges on the panel go awry, then felt the flaring incandescent heat as the rocket-radioactives let loose. What a miracle that he'd been ejected by the blast without shearing his suit against a piece of metal. Yes, what a miracle!—to be left floating free in the vastnesses of empty space.

And the words of the manual which they'd all memorized went through his thoughts again. But it had been so academic when they'd studied it. Who expected ever to be in this situation? It was merely a remote possibility.

It was? Who are you kidding, brother? That's where you are right now. Momentarily Linton wanted to scream aloud, to shout. He fought down the rising panic. Think, you fool, he told himself. Think! The suit will keep you alive for twenty hours. Surely the automatic radio pulse that instantaneously flares out at the first sign of trouble in a spacecraft, blasted out here. Don't worry. The patrol will pick you up. It's only a matter of time. Be sensible.

Linton had, as have all spacemen at one time or another, imagined what it would be like to be marooned alone in interplanetary space. But in his wildest fancies he had never thought it could be so terrorizing. Being lost in space was like—was like—no images would come to mind. Here a man was the smallest thing in the Universe, less than an atom. How could they find him? He was going to die.

You're in the Moon's gravitational field, he told himself. Eventually your perfectly preserved body will plunge into the pumice dust like a splashing meteorite. And no one will ever know. Linton. Clay,

twenty-four, Communications Officer, died because of a technical accident on a Lunar mission. Yes, your name will be inscribed on the service rolls.

With an effort Linton forced himself to stop the dangerous cynical trend of thought. The awkward metallic balloon that housed him needn't be my coffin—they'll find me before—before... Suddenly the phones in the helmet crackled: "Patrol Six-Oh-Nine—we've caught an emergency radio pulse. Are you in the vicinity? Key in your low power transmitter."

Linton gasped. He pushed the button in the sleeve. And then he fainted...

"Well, Linton" the executive officer was saying in the pilot room of the patrol craft, "was it very bad out there?"

Linton looked up at him. There was a wry smile on his pale face.

"No," he answered, "it wasn't too bad." But he continued to stare out the port and the stars winked back at him.

VISITOR TO THE FUTURE

CAIUS SEPTIMUS, centurion of the Fourth Legion, sweated and groaned with his seventy men, through these rocky fastnesses on the edge of the Nigerian desert. Caves and gaping slashes in the Earth testified the strangeness of the world.

Curse Claudius, Caius thought, curse him a thousand times! He grinned wryly, but a centurion obeys a proconsul. If Claudius believed the silly tale of the giant reptile, brought in by some half-witted natives, he, Caius, would have to seek it out for the proconsul.

The grumbling men toiled behind him, their armor intolerable in the humid heat. Now they were walking two abreast down a narrow defile. On Caius' right was the mouth of a dank and gaping cave.

Suddenly a hideous scream split the air. There was a rumbling earth-shaking sound. Everyone stood paralyzed for a moment at the apparition that greeted them. Caius' Roman training had taught him nothing of the prehistoric dinosaur; he didn't know that such things as Tyrannosaurus Rex ever existed on the Earth. All he saw was a monstrous reptilian thing, its mouth gaping like a huge furnace, its lungs bellowing, and its body emitting an overpowering stench of decayed and rotten flesh.

It rumbled from the cave trampling down a dozen men in its path. Caius went white with fear, but as a legionary he could not betray his proud Roman heritage. He stood stock still, raging at his men. A few obeyed him, crouched, their shields overlapping, planted their pila butts in the earth and waited the onslaught. It was terrible. They were bowled over like nine-pins, and the monster waddled past with the trivial pikes hanging from his thick and stinking skin.

Caius stood to one side. He seized a pila

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from a soldier. With all his strength he flung it and had the satisfaction of seeing the weapon strike deep into one of the beady eyes. The giant threshed in agony, half-blinded, still a powerful machine of destruction.

A dozen more men fell before its wild-flailing tail. Its horrible jaws crunched other. It dreadful little forefoot which hung from its chest did damage too.

The legionnaires had scattered and even Caius crouched behind the bole of a heavy tree watching the monster fearfully as it thrashed about. Caius' pila had penetrated the brain, but the rudimentary nervous system took time to send the message of death. Grunting and blowing the dying monster fled into the jungle.

When the sounds of terror died away, the legionnaires reassembled. But Caius gave not his usual tongue-lashing. The fear was too great within him. A few brief commands and the remnants of the command returned the way they had come. Caius' name is unknown now, but he had been the first and last man on earth to see a living dinosaur, a strange remnant of the world that existed before the conception of Man. What Caius thought is not recorded. What he felt we can easily imagine!

PLANET BUSTER!

By

BOB VANIER

NOT LONG ago, pictures were released showing the explosions of some new atomic bombs somewhere in the South Pacific—Eniwetok or some other remote isle. The pictures showed mushroom shapes much like the ones we've seen.

But according to the blurbs and captions, these new bombs are considerably more powerful. No area-destruction figures were given, nor were efficiencies quoted, but not much was left to the imagination. Bigger and better atomic bombs are in existence and still bigger and better in the making.

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When the first bomb was dropped, many speculated on the possibility of destroying the world either through a chain reaction or through a bomb huge enough to shatter the planet. Then, the idea was pooh-poohed.

Is it now possible for this thing to happen? We hear no denials, and are beginning to feel like a little boy sitting on a powder keg. And our fuse is time.

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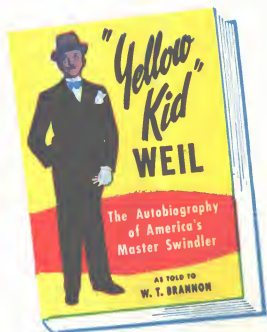
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